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Base treaties on national interest: SC

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Not regular activity: India skips BRICS naval drills

Drills held amid fears of US strike on Iran

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

India on Saturday confirmed it did not participate in a South Africa-initiated multilateral naval exercise involving several BRICS countries, clarifying that the exercise was not an institutional activity under the grouping.

Speaking to the media, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "The exercise in question was entirely a South African initiative in which some BRICS members took part. It was not a regular or institutionalised BRICS activity, nor did all members participate." India has historically abstained from such exercises, he noted, adding that the regular trilateral naval exercise India participates in is IBSAMAR, which brings together the navies of India, Brazil and South Africa. The last edition of IBSAMAR was held in October 2024.

Meanwhile, American and Pakistani troops concluded a two-week joint exercise, Inspired Gambit 2026, at the National Counter-Terrorism Centre in Pabbi. The training, held from 8–16 January, focused on combined infantry skills, tactics and counterterrorism operations. A US Central Command statement highlighted that such exercises strengthen long-standing defence ties amid broader signs of re-engagement between the two militaries.

The week-long naval exercise saw participation from China & Russia

- Meanwhile, American and Pakistani troops concluded a two-week joint exercise, Inspired Gambit 2026, at the National Counter-Terrorism Centre in Pabbi.

The South Africa-led week-long naval exercise saw participation from China, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It took place amid rising tensions in Iran over potential military strikes following its crackdown on anti-government protests.

India currently chairs BRICS, which expanded in 2024–25 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE and Indonesia, collectively representing around 49.5 per cent of the global population, 40 per cent of global GDP and 26 per cent of world trade. The Congress criticised the Modi government over the US-Pakistan exercise, calling it "yet another blow to self-proclaimed Vishwaguru diplomacy." *—PTI*

Infiltration biggest challenge for Bengal: PM

PM Narendra Modi during flagging off the country's first Vande Bharat sleeper train in Malda, West Bengal on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

MALDA, 17 JAN

At a mega rally in the Muslim-majority district of North Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said infiltration posed "a very big challenge", even as he asserted that the BJP would take "big action" to stop illegal migration and weed out infiltrators if voted to power in the ensuing assembly elections in West Bengal.

"There are developed and prosperous countries in the world that have no shortage of money, yet they are removing infiltrators. It is equally necessary to remove infiltrators from West Bengal," the Prime Minister said.

At the same time, Modi sought to assuage fears of refugee communities. "This is Modi's guarantee that genuine refugees, including the Matua and Namasudra communities who fled religious persecution in neighbouring countries, need not fear. The Constitution grants them the right to live here, and the CAA ensures their protection," he said.

Modi alleged that the TMC's "syndicate" system was working to ensure infiltrators were settled in the state, claiming there was an "alliance between infiltrators and the ruling party."

"You will have to break this alliance. I assure you that as soon as a BJP government is formed, strict action will be taken against infiltration and infiltrators," he said.

Modi, who is on his second visit to the state in less than a month, earlier launched a series of rail and road infrastructure projects worth about Rs 3,250 crore in the state and flagged off the first Vande Bharat sleeper train between Howrah and Guwahati before his rally in Malda, a key electoral battleground. *—PTI*

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INDIA'S 1ST SLEEPER VANDE BHARAT

India got its first Sleeper Vande Bharat on Saturday, flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Here are the details

ROUTE: Howrah (West Bengal) Guwahati (Kamakhya), Assam

DISTANCE: 966 KM

TIMING: 3 hours saved as it will cut travel time from 17 to 14 hours.

APPROXIMATE FARES (ONE-WAY)

- 3AC: ₹2,300
- 2AC: ₹3,000
- 1AC: ₹3,600

HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 modern sleeper coaches.
- Passenger capacity: 823.
- Top speed: Up to 180 kmph.
- Ergonomically designed sleeping berths.
- Automatic doors with inter-coach vestibules.
- Onboard catering for overnight travel.
- Modern toilets with advanced disinfectant technology.

Bheemanna Khandre laid to rest in Bidar

BIDAR, 17 JAN

Veteran Congress leader, freedom fighter and former minister Bheemanna Khandre was laid to rest with full state honours at Bhalki in Karnataka's Bidar district on Saturday. Thousands, including religious heads, public representatives and leaders across party lines, paid their last respects. A prominent Lingayat leader, Khandre died of age-related ailments and respiratory problems. As per his wish, he was shifted from hospital to his residence in Bhalki before his death. He was buried beside his wife at the family's agricultural land, Shantidham, on the town's outskirts. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Hindu man crushed to death in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI/DHAKA, 17 JAN

A Hindu fuel station worker was crushed to death in Bangladesh after he tried to stop a vehicle from leaving a petrol pump without paying, police said. It has not been confirmed whether the incident, which took place on Friday in Rajbari district, is related to the recent spate of violence targeting Hindus in Bangladesh. The victim is 30-year-old Ripon Saha, The Daily Star newspaper reported on Saturday, quoting police officials. He was working at Karim Filling Station in Goalanda Mor at the time of the incident, it said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Hyderabad varsity marks Rohith's death anniversary

HYDERABAD, 17 JAN

Students of the University of Hyderabad on Saturday boycotted classes and marched on campus to mark the 10th death anniversary of research scholar Rohith Vemula. Vemula died by suicide in a hostel room on 17 January, 2016, an incident that sparked nationwide protests. The University of Hyderabad Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) said students gathered at Velivaada in support of the Justice for Rohith Vemula movement, calling it a decade of "justice denied". Rohith's mother Radhika Vemula, Congress MLA Jignesh Mevani and students paid floral tributes at the Rohith Stupa. A 'Mashal Juloos' (torch procession) was also held on campus. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Cong MLA links women's beauty to rape

BHOPAL, 17 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Phool Singh Baraiya has sparked outrage after allegedly linking women's appearance to rape and describing sexual crimes against Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women as "teerth phal" (rewards of pilgrimage). The remarks, made during a media interview, went viral on social media. The ruling BJP and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav condemned the comments as misogynistic and anti-Dalit, urging Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to act against the MLA. The Congress distanced itself from the statement, saying it reflected Baraiya's personal views and that he has been asked to clarify. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Chinnaswamy gets nod to host int'l, IPL matches

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) has received permission from the state Home Department to host international and IPL matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, ending months of uncertainty.

The clearance follows a government-appointed task force report, which deemed the stadium's security enhancements satisfactory. KSCA spokesperson Vinay Mruthyunjaya said that the association is confident of meeting all parameters laid down by the government and will comply with specific conditions prescribed by authorities. Cricket activities at Chinnaswamy were halted after a stampede during RCB) IPL trophy celebrations last year claimed 11 lives. Investigations cited inadequate crowd management when nearly three lakh fans gathered on 4 June 2025.

PHOTO: X

Under the new state association regime led by former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad, KSCA has held talks with government agencies and presented a detailed compliance roadmap to the Expert Review Committee, committing to implement all safety, security, and crowd-management measures. The development may halt discussions of RCB shifting home matches to Raipur or Pune this IPL. In a communication to KSCA, RCB proposed installing 300–350 AI-enabled cameras at the stadium. *—PTI*

RACE FOR MUMBAI MAYOR

Sena moves its elected corporators to hotel

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

The Shiv Sena has shifted its newly elected corporators to a luxury hotel in Bandra as the contest for Mumbai's next mayor heats up.

The Eknath Shinde-led party contested 90 seats in the civic polls and won 29, announced on Friday. A senior leader said the corporators were being housed in the hotel to "refresh" after a hectic election season, while another functionary added that the move was partly for orientation of the newly elected members. The duration of their stay is expected to be a couple of days.

The move comes after Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said his party could still install a mayor in the city if "God wills." Shinde's 28 corporators are pivotal for the BJP, which seeks to elect its mayor for the first time in Mumbai.

The BJP emerged as the single largest party in the 227-member Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), winning 89 seats and ending the Thackerays' three-decade-long dominance. Shiv Sena (Shinde) bagged 29 seats, while Shiv Sena (UBT) managed 65. MNS won six seats, Congress (in alliance with Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi) 24, AIMIM eight, NCP three, Samajwadi Party two, and NCP (SP) one. The BJP also emerged as the largest party in more than a dozen municipal corporations across Maharashtra, including Pune and Navi Mumbai, breaching strongholds of the Thackerays and Pawars. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

No proof that paracetamol leads to autism: Lancet study

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

A new study has found no evidence that taking paracetamol during pregnancy increases the risk of autism, ADHD, or intellectual disabilities in children. The research, published in The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health, followed rigorous methodologies and reviewed 43 previous studies.

Paracetamol, an over-the-counter drug commonly used for fever and body aches, had been linked in earlier studies to a small potential increase in autism or ADHD risk. However, researchers from the University of Liverpool and European institutes noted that such studies were often prone to biases.

The team focused on studies with the largest and most robust designs, including sibling comparison analyses. "Current evidence does not indicate a clinically important increase in the likelihood of autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, or intellectual disability in children of pregnant individuals who use paracetamol as directed, supporting existing recommendations on its safety," the authors wrote.

"When considering sibling comparison studies, paracetamol exposure during pregnancy was not associated with autism spectrum disorder risk," they added.

Rudrarup Bhattacharjee, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Adelaide, said the findings are significant, noting that earlier concerns were largely driven by observational studies. *—PTI*

DKS CANCELS DAVOS VISIT AMID POLITICAL TUSSLE

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has cancelled his scheduled visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, citing official engagements in New Delhi and Bengaluru.

"The Deputy CM has a series of meetings lined up with AICC functionaries regarding Assam Assembly elections and is also spearheading the campaign against the Union government over MGNREGA due to which a five-day special session of the Karnataka Assembly is scheduled to begin from 22 January," his office said in a release on Saturday. According to the Deputy CM's itinerary, Shivakumar will be travelling from New Delhi to Bidar in northern Karnataka on Saturday evening to attend the funeral of former minister Bheemanna Khandre, who died late on Friday night, at the age of 102, in Bidar. Later, he will travel to New Delhi via Hyderabad at night.

The decision to skip the Davos summit and Shivakumar's return to Delhi has fuelled speculations about a leadership change in the State. *—PTI*

HOME SWEET HOME

Relief as Indians stranded in Iran return

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Poignant scenes of relief and reunion unfolded at Delhi airport early on Saturday as families embraced their loved ones who returned from Iran amid mounting security concerns in the country.

While some welcomed their children with flower garlands, a father held his daughter close, smiling through tears—an image that captured the tumult of emotions families experienced during their loved ones' unsettling time in Iran.

Many returnees, including students, described their final days in Iran as fraught with tension and uncertainty. "It was a very difficult time," said one student arriving from Tehran. "The situation on the streets was tense and the internet shutdown made us feel completely isolated. Reaching India and seeing our families waiting for us brought a sense of safety and relief."

Families anxiously awaited outside the arrival terminal of Indira Gandhi International Airport, scanning the crowd for their **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Shazid, another student, recalled the distressing atmosphere. "Once we were informed about the travel arrangements, there was a sense of relief. Reaching home is something we truly needed," he said.

An anxious relative, Abbas Qazami, described the lengthening hours of worry during the communication blackout. "When the internet was shut, we were extremely worried. Once communication resumed and the embassy became involved, we felt reassured," he stated.

The Indian government had previously advised citizens to leave Iran as protests erupted, driven by economic distress and demands for political reform. Approximately 9,000 Indians, primarily students, remain in Iran. *—PTI*

Delhi presses for consular access to 16 detained Indians

Idia will continue to press Iranian authorities to grant early consular access to the 16 Indian crew members of a commercial vessel that was detained last month, the Indian embassy in Tehran said on Saturday.

The mission said it was informed in mid-December about the detention of the vessel, MT Valiant Roar, with the Indian crew onboard. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 6

Dad of detained sailor in Iran seeks govt help

The father of an engineer, who was among the 16 crew members of an oil tanker reportedly seized by Iran, urged Indian authorities to intervene to free his son from detention.

Mukesh Mehta and his son Ketan were working as 3rd Engineer on the oil tanker MT Valiant Roar, operated by Prime Tanker LLC, Dubai.

The vessel was reportedly intercepted last month at Bandar Abbas Port in Iran.

Mehta appealed to the Government of India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Directorate General of Shipping to urgently intervene and take immediate diplomatic action for safe and early release.

PHOTO: PTI

Police seize 260g ganja in Hanur, one held

MYSURU, 17 JAN

Hanur Town Police of Chamarajanagar district arrested a person on the charge of trying to sell ganja near a bridge on Lokkanahalli road in Hanur town on Saturday and seized 260gm of ganja. According to a police report, the accused, Shivanna, 36, hails from Havinamoole village of Hanur taluk. On a tip off, a team of Hanur Crime branch police personnel led by sub inspector Ravi carried out the drive and arrested Shivanna red handed while attempting to sell ganja. He was booked under Sections 8(c) and 20(b) of NDPS Act, 1985. A court in Hanur remanded him in judicial custody. Police have intensified the operation to curb the sale of ganja in their jurisdiction.—*Salar News*

Excise officier caught accepting bribes in City

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The Karnataka Lokayukta police on Saturday said they have caught "red-handed" Excise Department Deputy Commissioner of the Bengaluru Urban District Jagadeesh Naik and two other officials, while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 25 lakh. The two other officials are Superintendent of Excise Thammanna KM and Excise Constable Lakkappa Gani. The Lokayukta officials had successfully laid a trap under the supervision of senior officials, based on a complaint, they said. All three have been arrested. They have been booked under relevant sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act. They have been accused of demanding Rs 80 lakh to issue CL-7 (Hotels & Boarding Houses) and micro-brewery licence.—*PTI*

HCM: No problem if JD(S), BJP contest civic polls together

MYSURU, 17 JAN

Mysuru district in-charge Minister HC Mahadevappa on Saturday said the BJP-JD(S) alliance was unlikely to pose any threat to the Congress party in the ensuing local body elections. Speaking to reporters here, he said that the BJP and JDS fought on their own terms without making any alliance in previous parliamentary elections, but now both have entered into a pact and are fighting together for the upcoming local body polls. The alliance will have no impact on Congress. Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has said that the JD(S) should merge with the BJP, noting that a three-way fight would only confuse voters, given that the two parties would in alliance otherwise. —*Salar News*

KBG flays officials for slow pace of NH-75 construction

MYSURU, 17 JAN

Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Friday criticised the slow pace of work on the NH-75 bypass road in Hassan district and pulled up National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) officials over the prolonged delay. During an inspection of the Sakleshpur Road work at the Dorangallu section, the minister questioned officials on the reasons for the delay and whether it had been reported to the Centre. He accused an NHAI official of giving misleading explanations. District Collector KS Latha Kumari said the delay had continued for six months and stressed the need for immediate corrective measures. Officials were instructed to closely monitor progress and complete the pending work at the earliest. NH-75 is a key route connecting Mangaluru to Vellore.—*PTI*

'Govt negligence made Metro costliest in country'

Surya urges govt to form new FCC to revise payment structure

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Bengaluru Metro has become the costliest in the country, thanks to the State government's "negligence" in correcting mistakes caused by anomalies in fare fixation, **Bengaluru South BJP MP Tejasvi Surya** said on Saturday.

Alleging that the State government and Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) are now looking to hike fares by another 5 per cent in February to offset losses in operations and maintenance, Surya said on Saturday that these losses are largely the result of frequent delays in Metro construction, which significantly increase project costs.

Bengaluru Metro travel now costs nearly twice as much as in Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai, leading to a reduction in the number of metro users, he said.

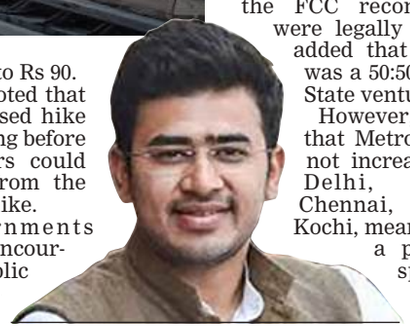
PHOTO: PTI

Surya urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to form a new Fare Fixation Committee (FCC) to determine a revised fare structure.

In February 2025, the BMRCL introduced revised prices as per FCC recommendation, resulting in ticket costs going up by up to 71 per cent on a few routes, with maximum rates reaching to Rs 90.

Surya noted that the proposed hike was coming before commuters could recover from the massive hike.

"Governments must be encouraging public transport, especially in cities like Bengaluru," Surya told press.



On Friday, Surya had written to Union Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, and BMRCL Managing Director J Ravishankar to reconstitute the FFC, citing serious anomalies in the recent fare revision.

However, the Karnataka Congress hit back on X, saying that the FCC is appointed by the Union government and not the State. It also claimed that the FCC recommendations were legally binding and added that the BMRCL was a 50:50 joint Centre State venture.

However, Surya noted that Metro prices have not increased in cities Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata or Kochi, meaning it wasn't a political conspiracy like the Congress says. —*PTI*

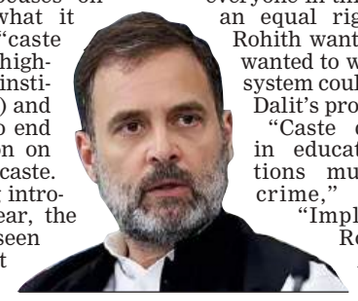
'K'TAKA WILL IMPLEMENT LAW'

Rohit Vemula Act needed to end caste bias: Rahul

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

On the 10th death anniversary of Dalit student Rohith Vemula on Saturday, Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** said that the Rohit Vemula Act is not just a slogan but a necessity. The Congress governments in Karnataka and Telangana are in the process of implementing the law, he added.

The proposed Karnataka Rohit Vemula (Prevention of Exclusion or Injustice) (Right to Education and Dignity) Bill, 2025, focuses on addressing what it calls the "caste realities" in higher education institutions (HEIs) and is intended to end discrimination on the basis of caste. Despite being introduced last year, the Act hasn't seen significant progress yet.



Gandhi said the reality for Dalit youngsters has not changed on campuses and stressed the need for an anti-discrimination law.

Vemula, a 26-year-old Dalit student of the University of Hyderabad, died by suicide on 17 January 2016, due to alleged harassment. His death triggered a nationwide agitation against casteism in institutions of higher learning.

On X, Gandhi wrote, "Rohith's question still resonates in our hearts: Does everyone in this country have an equal right to dream? Rohith wanted to study, he wanted to write.... But this system could not tolerate a Dalit's progress."

"Caste discrimination in educational institutions must become a crime," he said. "Implement the Rohit Vemula Act now.

— *PTI*

IN CM'S CONSTITUENCY

Man 'threatens' woman govt officer

MYSURU, 17 JAN

The Mysuru South Police have registered a case against a landowner for allegedly abusing, threatening, and obstructing a woman government officer from performing her duties in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's home constituency.

The incident comes close on the heels of the Sidlaghatta row.

The incident occurred on 31 December, but came to light after two officers leaked the audio to the media recently.

Puttaswamy had allegedly encroached on land that the government had notified 20-acres of land in Gudamadanahalli village, in Varuna assembly segment, Mysuru, for constructing a NIMHANS hospital unit.

He was allegedly cultivating arecanut on the land.

When Bandipalya Panchayat development officer G Bhavya and village assistant Naveenkumar came to the site on 31 December, Puttaswamy allegedly abused them and prevented them from carrying out inspections for the land acquisition.

Bhavya and Naveenkumar leaked the audio to the press.

Bhavya had filed a complaint recently with the police.

This comes after Congress leader Rajeev Gowda threatened Sidlaghatta Municipal Corporation Commissioner Amrutha Gowda over the alleged removal of flex banners, which came to light after a leaked audio. —*Salar News*

BJP holds rally over Ballari clash

BALLARI, 17 JAN

The Opposition BJP on Saturday held a mega protest rally targeting the ruling Congress government following the clashes in Ballari that led to the death of a person.

BJP leaders demanded the arrest of Congress MLA Nara Bharat Reddy in connection with the clashes and sought the transfer of the investigation into the case to the CBI.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka and Leader of Opposition in the Council and Chalavadi Narayana Swamy, former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, Janardhan Reddy, former minister B Sriramulu were among those present at the event.

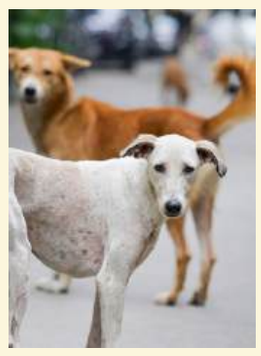
Earlier in the day, the BJP leaders visited the residence of Congress worker Rajashekar, who was killed in the incident, during which Jananrdhan's wife handed over Rs 10 lakh to the mother of the deceased, party sources said.

BJP leaders Janardhan Reddy, R Ashoka, BY Vijayendra, Basavaraj Bommai and others at the rally PHOTO: X @RAshokaBJP

Addressing the rally, Vijayendra said, "The law and order has completely deteriorated under the Congress.... Police stations have turned into Congress offices, so the atrocities of anti-national forces and anti-social elements have increased."

Vijayendra claimed that the BJP's High Command had not blocked the planned 'padayatre' (foot march) from Ballari to Bengaluru. He said the BJP's State core committee was discussing with the Central leadership.

Janardhan held Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy directly responsible for the death while Ashoka questioned the delay in arrests. —*PTI*



Belagavi man's attempt to evade dog turns fatal

BELAGAVI, 17 JAN

A tragic incident in Athani, Belagavi district, has spotlighted the increasing threat posed by stray dogs, following the fatal accident of motorcyclist Vishwanath Shirol on 15 January. The accident was initially thought to be a regular road incident until CCTV footage revealed that a stray dog was chasing him.

The collision occurred in Kumbhar Galli, where Vishwanath was riding his scooter when a dog began to pursue him. In a state of panic, he accelerated, lost control, and crashed into a nearby wall, resulting in his death at the scene.

Initially registered as a standard road accident, authorities revisited the case after reviewing the footage. Athani's Deputy Superintendent of Police, Prashant Munnolli, indicated that the findings were forwarded to the Athani Town Municipal Corporation, urging them to intensify measures to combat the stray dog issue. "Athani TMC commissioner Ashok Guddimani responded positively to our directives to curb the growing menace," he stated.

This incident follows another distressing case in Bagalkot, where a two-year-old girl was fatally mauled by stray dogs, further igniting public concern about the management of such animals in urban areas.

—*PTI*

BENGALURU HABBA

Children and adults alike have fun with the various exhibits during the Bengaluru Habba, at Freedom Park, in the City on Saturday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Puneeth Kerehalli held for threatening landlord over B'deshis

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Bengaluru police arrested Right-wing activist Puneet Kerehalli and his associate for allegedly threatening a landlord that the Hindutva leader claimed was harbouring illegal "Bangladeshi migrants".

Kerehalli was arrested late on Friday by Bannerghatta police.

In his complaint, Siddesh K, a resident of Doggathogur said that on 12 January, Kerehalli and Nagandrappa Shiroor had caused a commotion at one of the buildings he owned.

The duo were raking up a row over alleged Bangladeshis. When Siddesh tried to intervene, they asked him why he rented out the house to "Bangladeshis" and threatened him.

Kerehalli has launched a campaign to identify alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, claiming to expose their fake Aadhaar cards and Pan cards.

He has been uploading videos to social media where he enters people's homes and questions them about their nationality. —*Salar News*

CM flags corrupt cops, rise in cyber crimes

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with DG & IG MA Saleem after a meeting with police officials in City on Saturday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday cautioned against the involvement of police in criminal activities, while raising concerns over the rising tide of cybercrime and drug trafficking in the State.

Cases of theft, extortion, robbery, and murder are decreasing, but cybercrime and drug crimes are not, Siddaramaiah said.

He called for a higher standard of vigilance and effectiveness from the police force in dealing with such drug cases.

"If the Maharashtra police can come to Bengaluru and detect drugs, why can't the State police do it?

"Policemen are involved in about 88 cases," Siddaramaiah said.

The CM also took a hard line on foreign traffickers, calling for their immediate deportation. "If foreigners are released on bail and remain here, there is a high possibility of them committing the same crime again."

Siddaramaiah also said Congress leader Rajeen Gowda was absconding .—*PTI*

STATE BIDS FAREWELL

Bhimanna Khandre laid to rest in Bidar

BIDAR, 17 JAN

The last rites of veteran Congress leader and former State Minister Dr Bhimanna Khandre were conducted on Saturday. He had passed away on Friday night at the age of 103 due to age related ailments, his son Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwar B Khandre said.

The last rites were conducted at Shantidham as per Veerashaiva Lingayat customs.

Born on 8 January, 1923, in Gorta (B) village of Bhalki taluk in Bidar district, Khandre was a freedom fighter who participated in the Hyderabad Liberation Movement. Known as a "Lok Nayak," he made lasting contributions to cooperation, education and social service, and was honoured with the Suvarna Ekikaran State Award.

The last rites of leader Bhimanna Khandre (inset) in Bidar, on Saturday PHOTO: SALAR

Khandre entered politics in 1953 as the president of the Bhalki Municipal Council and went on to serve four terms as MLA and two terms as MLC.

He was the transport minister in sthe M Veerappa Moily cabinet.

A pioneer of the cooperative movement and a champion of farmers' welfare, he played a key role in the implementation of the Naranja and Karanja irrigation projects.

Condolences poured in from leaders across parties, including Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, and Basavaraj Bommai who recalled his role in the freedom struggle and Karnataka's unification. —*Salar News*

Govt, Premji Foundation to build hospital in City

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The State government has partnered with the Azim Premji Foundation to establish a multi-speciality hospital in Bengaluru. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that the Foundation intends to invest Rs 4,000 crore over five years for the hospital's development.

An agreement was signed between the Department of Medical Education and the Azim Premji Foundation for the creation and management of a 1,000-bed charitable super speciality and multi-organ transplant hospital. Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil, Foundation CEO Anurag Behar, and other dignitaries attended the signing ceremony.

The hospital aims to provide high-quality care to underserved populations, with 75 per cent of its beds offered at zero cost. The remaining beds will be priced similarly to government tertiary hospitals. The facility will focus on organ transplantation and will contribute to medical education and research.

The Foundation will cover all capital and operating costs, with the hospital established on government-owned land. Siddaramaiah expressed gratitude to Azim Premji for his philanthropic efforts. He acknowledged the Foundation's longstanding commitment to education and health, including scholarships for students. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Forensic lab says Atishi's video not tampered: Speaker

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Saturday said a forensic science laboratory report confirmed the video of Leader of Opposition Atishi's alleged remarks disrespecting Sikh Gurus was original and untampered. AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj rejected the report, claiming it did not clarify whether Atishi had actually said "Gurus", and accused the BJP of attempting to stir religious tension. Earlier, Punjab police had alleged the video was "doctored", prompting AAP chief whip Sanjiv Jha to demand action against minister Kapil Mishra for sharing it on social media. Gupta said he would seek a CBI probe into both the video and Punjab's forensic examination. He urged Atishi to meet him and apologise. *—PTI*

Ballia MP lashes out over chief guest snub

BALLIA, 17 JAN

Samajwadi Party MP Sanatan Pandey expressed anger after being overlooked as chief guest at a railway event in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh, saying officials who fail in their duties "should be beaten with shoes". The event at Phephna railway station on Friday was to have UP Ayush Minister Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' as chief guest, but he canceled due to unavoidable circumstances. Pandey said that whenever the central government launches a project, the local MP should be chief guest, even if from the opposition. "Today, this government has shown its true colours again," he said, adding he was ready to face any legal action than bow to the authorities. *—PTI*

Police block BRS rally for civic body in Secunderabad

HYDERABAD, 17 JAN

Police stopped scores of BRS cadres across Secunderabad on Saturday as they tried to join a 'peace rally' demanding a separate Secunderabad Municipal Corporation, saying the event lacked official permission. BRS Working President KT Rama Rao criticised the state government for blocking the rally. Former Minister and Sanathnagar MLA Talasani Srinivas Yadav had planned the march from Secunderabad Railway Station to the Gandhi statue on MG Road. Party leaders said police took workers into custody. Senior leader Harish Rao condemned the arrests. KTR warned that Secunderabad's historical identity was at risk and pledged that a future BRS government would make it a separate district. T Srinivas Yadav said the rally will proceed with permission from the court. *—PTI*

Antony Raju files appeal in evidence tampering case

T'PURAM, 17 JAN

LDF leader Antony Raju, who was disqualified as MLA after being sentenced in an evidence tampering case, has filed an appeal against his conviction before aThiruvananthapuram court . The court, after considering the petition on Saturday, posted the matter to 24 January. In his appeal, Raju challenged the verdict of the magistrate's court, alleging that a fair trial was not conducted in the case. Raju, a leader of the Janadhipathya Kerala Congress, a constituent of the ruling Left Democratic Front, was sentenced to three years of imprisonment by the Judicial First Class Magistrate-I Court, Nedumangad, in a case related to tampering of evidence while serving as a lawyer for an Australian citizen arrested in a drug case in 1990. *—PTI*

45% of M'rashtra now in BJP's hand

Mahayuti will come to power in 25 municipalities

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Riding on the momentum from its strong showing in the November 2024 assembly elections, the BJP has further expanded its footprint in Maharashtra even as the political bases of other parties are shrinking, a party office-bearer said on Saturday.

Additionally, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday said the BJP's 45 per cent vote share in the BMC elections reflected a decisive mandate, and its tally was higher than that of Shiv Sena (UBT) despite contesting fewer seats.

The BJP's vote share was 45 per cent while that of the Shiv Sena (UBT), which contested 30 more seats, was 27 per cent, Fadnavis said, adding, "This clearly shows the strength of our mandate and the strong support we have received."

The assessment by the BJP's Chief Spokesperson, Keshav Upadhye, was based on the saffron party's stellar showing in the civic polls across 29 municipal corporations, a day after the results were declared. The Mahayuti alliance is set to come to power in 25 of the 29 municipal corporations, including Mumbai.

He noted that the number of municipal corporations in Maharashtra rose from 27 to 29 after Ichalkaranji and Jalna were granted civic body status.

The BJP won both new corporations by comfortable margins, according to data released by the state election commission.

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra Cabinet on Saturday extended toll relief extension for electric vehicles at Atal Setu by another year and cleared a slew of decisions related to infrastructure and urban transport, a day after Mahayuti scored a won the civic polls. *—PTI*

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis PHOTO: PTI

> **... people's trust in the triple-engine leadership stands testimony to a politics rooted in progress, not baseless divisive propaganda**
>
> -K Annamalai, BJP Leader

> **Now those parties who abuse us (as BJP's B team) should think of themselves. It is the decision of the people**
>
> -Asaduddin Owaisi, AIMIM Chief

'BJP won BMC polls by stealing votes'

Uddhav cries foul, Cong leaders blame Gaikwad

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Following the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, Uddhav Thackeray alleged that the BJP's success resulted from vote manipulation.

The BJP secured 89 seats, ending the Thackeray family's decades-long dominance, while Shiv Sena (UBT) won 65, and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) managed only six. Despite acknowledging the MNS's poor performance, Raj Thackeray pledged to advocate for the Marathi "manoos," urging party members to remain steadfast in their fight for Marathi pride.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Saturday congratulated the BJP after the party trounced his NCP and NCP (SP) alliance in the Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad civic polls.

Additionally, factions of the NCP led by Ajit Pawar and his uncle Sharad Pawar will contest the upcoming Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections together, an NCP (SP) Maharashtra unit President Shashikant Shinde said on Saturday. Speaking to reporters, Shinde said the factions have decided to join hands for the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections scheduled on 5 February.

In a related development, Mumbai Congress Chief Varsha Gaikwad faced pressure to resign after the party's representation dwindled from 31 to 24 seats. *—PTI*

Rashmi Thackeray, Uddhav Thackeray, Aaditya Thackeray and others PHOTO: X/SHIVASENA

HERE'S HOW NEW MAYOR IS APPOINTED IN MUMBAI

Mumbai will appoint a new mayor by the end of January after the BJP and Shiv Sena secured a significant victory in the BMC elections. The Urban Development Department will conduct a lottery next week to determine the reservation category for the mayoral post. Following this, candidates will file their nominations, and the elected corporators will vote in a special assembly. Candidate with a majority will be elected. *—Agencies*

'FOR THOSE WRONGLY TARGETED'

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Chief Justice Surya Kant and others PHOTO: ANI SCREENGRAB

With CJI on stage, Didi appeals to be protected from ED

JALPAIGURI/KOLKATA, 17 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday urged Chief Justice Surya Kant to protect the people of the country from being wrongly targeted by "agencies".

Justice Kant was present at the building inauguration of the Calcutta High Court, where Banerjee, in her speech, called on him to safeguard the Constitution, democracy, and judiciary. "Please protect the Constitution, democracy, judiciary, history, and geography of the country from disaster," she said, without elaborating. "These days, there is a trend of media trials before the disposal of cases, this must stop too," Banerjee said.

TMC HITS BACK, ASKS MODI TO RELEASE WHITE PAPER

In response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's allegations that the TMC is "looting" central funds meant for the poor, the party on Saturday challenged the Centre to release a white paper on fund allocations to West Bengal since the BJP's 2021 assembly defeat.

Modi, during a campaign rally in Bengal on Saturday, called the West Bengal ruling TMC "cruel and heartless" for "looting" public money and blocking central benefits, and said real welfare will occur only when the "obstructive TMC" is replaced by "a pro-BJP government."

The Mamata Banerjee-led party struck back at Modi, questioning his pledge to provide a permanent home to every poor household in Bengal.

"Really? Then why has the Centre withheld Rs 24,275 crore of Bengal's Awas Yojana funds?" the party said on its official X handle. *—PTI*

Al-Falah hired prof without checks: ED

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Faridabad-based Al Falah University had appointed three doctors linked the November 2025 Red Fort area blast without police verification, the Enforcement Directorate has found.

While two of them were arrested by the National Investigation Agency, the third was an alleged suicide bomber, who carried out the blast. The agency, as part of its money laundering probe, in its chargesheet sought prosecution of Al Falah Group chairman Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui and the Al Falah Charitable Trust for alleged generation of illicit funds from fees paid by students, while allegedly misrepresenting the accreditation and recognition of his institutions.

ED attached the university land and building, worth about Rs 140 crore and located in Faridabad.

Doctors at the medical college were employed "on paper" and were listed under a "22 days punch" or "two days per week" clause to be represented as regular faculty "just to obtain" requisite approvals from the National Medical Commission so that the healthcare facility runs uninterrupted. However, they neither attended college on a regular basis nor took classes or attended to patients at its hospital.

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University said the three doctors - Muzammil Ganaie, Shaheen Saeed and Umar Nabi, the alleged suicide bomber, were "recommended" by the varsity's HR head and "approved" by Siddiqui. She then issued appointment letters. *—PTI*

ED attached the university land and building, worth about Rs 140 crore and located in Faridabad PHOTO: PTI

Govt responsible for Indore water fatalities, says RaGa

INDORE, 17 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday blamed the government's negligence for the fatalities linked to contaminated drinking water in Madhya Pradesh's Indore.

Accompanied by MP Congress president Jitu Patwari and Leader of the Opposition in the assembly, Umang Singhar, Gandhi met four patients and their families affected by the diarrhoea outbreak linked to water contamination in Indore's Bhagirathpura, emphasising that "clean water is a public right". He also visited the area.

He also said Indore is a new model smart city that doesn't even have clean drinking water.

Raising questioned the urban model, saying that this was happening in several cities.

Gandhi further said the state government must be held accountable for the drinking water disaster. *—PTI*

LoP and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi meets a patient undergoing treatment after contaminated water consumption in Indore PHOTO: PTI

'Govt treating Muslims as 2nd-class citizens'

T'PURAM, 17 JAN

Kerala Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** made a pointed remark on Friday, toward the BJP-ruled Centre. He said that laws and policies such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the new Waqf Act are exclusionary towards sections of society.

Speaking at the concluding session of the 'Kerala Yatra'—a Kerala Muslim Jamaat event—in Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayan accused the Centre of using these policies to treat Muslim citizens as second-rate through segregation.

Addressing the gathering at Putharikandam grounds, Vijayan asserted that majority communalism cannot be countered by minority communalism, as the two forces inevitably reinforce each other. He argued that the only viable solution is to strengthen secularism.

The CM warned that people were being deliberately divided along religious and racial lines. He praised the Kerala Yatra led, saying, "In this era when conscious efforts are being made to separate people in the name of religion or race, such moves are a great defence against it."

Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan and other Congress leaders were also present for the session. *—PTI*

BJP DEMANDS REMOVAL

Rape happens when a man sees a beautiful girl: MP Cong MLA

BHOPAL/INDORE, 17 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Phool Singh Baraiya has sparked a row after allegedly linking women's beauty to rape and associating sexual crimes against women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with what he described as "teerth phal" (rewards of pilgrimage).

Baraiya's statements came to the fore on Saturday, when Lok Sabha Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi was in Indore in connection with the water contamination tragedy there.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and the MP's ruling BJP strongly condemned Baraiya's remarks, expressing hope that Gandhi would take action against the Congress MLA.

The Congress disagreed with the statement and said the MLA had been asked to clarify it. Despite the controversy, Baraiya stood by his comment, claiming that it was in the interest of 40 crore women from the SC and ST communities. He also clarified that his statement had nothing to do with the Congress or Rahul Gandhi.

In a video, Baraiya purportedly claims that the highest number of rapes in India are against women from SC, ST, and "Most Backward Classes".

He said, "So what I mean is the theory of rape is that if a man is walking on the road and sees a beautiful girl, extremely beautiful, his mind may get distracted. Then rape can happen," he said, while going on to ask what "extremely beautiful" women existed among tribals, Dalits and OBCs. BJP's Madhya Pradesh media in-charge Ashish Usha Agrawal demanded Baraiya's expulsion from tha party. *—PTI*

Phool Singh Baraiya PHOTO: ANI

- Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and the MP's ruling BJP strongly condemned Baraiya's remarks, expressing hope that Gandhi would take action against the Congress MLA.

Javed Akhtar rejects ARR's Bollywood 'communal' claim

MUMBAI/RAJASTHAN, 17 JAN

Music maestro **AR Rahman** has ignited significant debate following recent comments regarding his diminishing role in Hindi film music.

In an interview with BBC Asian Network, the Oscar-winning composer noted a decline in Bollywood work offers, attributing this to decisions made by "non-creative" individuals, suggesting it "might have been a communal thing also."

Rahman remarked that he often receives project information through "Chinese whispers" and that while some films approach him, music companies eventually opt for other composers.

Despite the situation, he expressed a sense of calm, appreciating the extra time with his family.

Reactions from the industry were swift. Playback singer Shaan dismissed any notion of biased opportunities, viewing his own decrease in work as a personal phase rather than discrimination.

Veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar echoed this sentiment, asserting he has never experienced communal discrimination in the industry.

Columnist Shobhaa De deemed Rahman's comments "dangerous," stressing that talent, not religion, governs success in Bollywood.

Composer Leslie Lewis advocated the necessity to prioritise creativity over dwelling on work opportunities. *—Agencies*

- Shobhaa De deemed Rahman's comments "dangerous," stressing that talent, not religion, governs success in Bollywood.

PHOTO: PTI

Chill intensifies in Kashmir, dense fog covers Delhi

SRINAGAR, 17 JAN

The chill intensified across Kashmir as minimum temperatures fell further, with Srinagar recording minus 3.2°C and Shopian the coldest at minus 5.6°C. The valley is in the midst of Chilla-i-Kalan, the harshest winter period marked by frequent sub-zero nights. The IMD forecast back-to-back western disturbances, bringing light snow to higher reaches over the weekend. Meanwhile, dense fog blanketed New Delhi on Saturday morning, with the minimum temperature at 4.4°C, 3.2°C below average. Air quality remained a major concern, with the AQI at 376, placing it in the very poor category. —*PTI*

Police kill suspect behind Kabaddi promoter's murder

CHANDIGARH, 17 JAN

Karan Pathak, one of the shooters involved in the murder of Kabaddi promoter Kanwar Digvijay Singh, alias Rana Balachauria, was killed during a shootout with Punjab Police in Mohali after escaping custody. Pathak, arrested along with two accomplices, fled when a police vehicle hit a divider in foggy conditions while taking him to hospital. Spotted in Kharar, he fired at officers, who returned fire, injuring him. He later died in hospital. The weapon he used remains unrecovered. —*PTI*

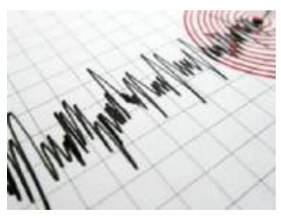


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Quake rattles Kutch, no casualties

AHMEDABAD, 17 JAN

A 4.1-magnitude earthquake struck Gujarat's Kutch district early on Saturday, causing panic but no casualties, officials said. The tremor occurred at 1.22am, with its epicentre about 55km north-northeast of Khavda, according to the Gandhinagar-based Institute of Seismological Research (ISR). A district disaster management official confirmed there was no damage to property. Kutch, located in a "very high risk" seismic zone, regularly experiences minor quakes. The district was also hit by a 7.6-magnitude earthquake on 26 January, 2001, which killed 13,800 people. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Four Naxalites shot dead in Bijapur encounter

BIJAPUR, 17 JAN

Security forces gunned down four Naxalites on Saturday, including senior cadre Dilip Vedja, in an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said. The encounter broke out in the morning in the forested hills of the district's northwest region, where a joint team of security forces was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav said. He said that the Special Task Force and District Reserve Guard, both state police units, and CoBRA, an elite unit of the CRPF, were involved in the operation, which was launched based on inputs about the presence of Vedja, a divisional committee member, in the area. "The bodies of two Maoists were recovered from the encounter site. Later, the bodies of two more Maoist were recovered," Yadav said. —*PTI*

Base treaties on national interest: SC

Court says treaties can't be based on foreign pressure; okays taxes on Tiger Global

A view of the Supreme Court of India PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Treaties should be driven by national interest, not by pressure from foreign governments or corporations, the Supreme Court said while asserting that India must safeguard its tax sovereignty, ensure fairness, and prevent abuse while entering into international tax pacts.

The observations by Justice JB Pardiwala came while a judgment in which the SC upheld the decision of the domestic revenue authorities that capital gains arising from US-based investor firm Tiger Global's exit from Flipkart in 2018 are taxable in India.

- Tax treaties and protocols should be transparent and must allow periodical reviews with the power to renegotiate with strong exit clauses to avoid unfair outcomes. They must safeguard the nation's security, prevent erosion of the tax base and the weakening of democratic control, Judge Pardiwala said in his order

Justice Pardiwala wrote a separate but concurring opinion, spelling out broader principles on how India should approach international tax treaties.

"Tax treaties, international agreements, protocols and safeguards should be engaging, transparent and must allow periodical reviews with the right to renegotiate with strong exit clauses to avoid unfair outcomes. They must safeguard the nation's security, prevent erosion of the tax base and the weakening of democratic control and also introduce explicit carve outs safeguarding the sovereign's right of taxation. Treaties should be driven by national interest, not pressure from foreign governments or corporations," Justice Pardiwala said.

The Suprem Court laid down detailed safeguards to ensure that tax treaties protect the country's economic sovereignty, revenue base and public interest.

Justice Pardiwala suggested a comprehensive set of safeguards that India should adopt while negotiating or renewing international tax treaties, including incorporating limitation of benefits clauses to prevent treaty shopping by shell companies, allowing domestic anti-avoidance laws such as the General Anti-Avoidance Rule.

He said treaties should reflect broader economic and public interest, not just bureaucratic or diplomatic goals.

Tiger Global exited Flipkart in 2018, when Walmart Inc. acquired a controlling stake in the Indian company. Tiger Global approached the Income Tax Department in February 2019 for an Advance Authority Ruling to adjudicate on the matter. — *PTI*

MIGRANT'S DEATH

Tyres set on fire during a protest in Murshidabad in West Bengal over the death of a migrant Bengali worker in Jharkhand PHOTO: PTI

Fresh unrest in Murshidabad; NH, rail tracks blocked

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

Fresh unrest gripped West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Saturday as protesters again blocked National Highway-12 and railway tracks at Beldanga, a day after violent protests over the death of a migrant had cur road and rail links between the state's northern and southern parts for hours, police said.

Hundreds of people gathered on the highway at Barua More in Beldanga, bringing traffic on NH-12 to a standstill and triggering long queues of stranded vehicles, while protesters also damaged a railway gate and attempted to disrupt train services.

Police baton-charged the crowds at a few places to disperse them, locals said.

The latest spark was an allegation that another migrant worker – Anisur Sheikh – from the area was brutally assaulted in Bihar, reigniting public anger that had barely subsided after Friday's violence. Police deployed a large contingent at the protest site, while local MLA Humayun Kabir reached the spot and held talks with demonstrators and officials.

Officials said efforts were underway to restore normalcy and prevent the agitation from spiralling into fresh violence.

Tension has been simmering in Beldanga since Friday following the death of 36-year-old Alauddin Sheikh, a resident of the Sujapur Kumarpur gram panchayat area, whose body was recovered from his rented house in Jharkhand.

His family alleged that he was beaten to death and later hung to make it appear like a suicide. — *PTI*

Jharkhand tribals call protest against village head's murder

RANCHI, 17 JAN

Tribal activists took to the streets in several districts of Jharkhand on Saturday to enforce a bandh in protest against the killing of a village head in Khunti earlier this month.

The demonstrators were seen burning tyres to block roads in tribal-majority districts.

The impact of the Jharkhand bandh was witnessed in Khunti, Simdega, Chaibasa and Gumla districts in the morning hours, with shops remaining closed and public transport off the roads. Schools were closed in major parts of the state due to the shutdown.

In Ranchi, the bandh's impact was not visible, as markets and business establishments remained open and commuters were seen going to their workplaces.

The state administration made elaborate security arrangements to maintain peace across districts, a senior police officer said, adding that additional forces have been deployed in the state's capital Ranchi.

Protesters block a road in Khunti during the 'Jharkhand bandh,' called to protest the murder of tribal village head, Soma Munda, in the Khunti district of Jharkhand PHOTO: PTI

Laxmi Narayan Munda, a prominent social activist and tribal leader, said, "Over 20 tribal organisations are participating in the bandh today. We seek justice for Soma Munda."

Soma Munda, the 'Adel Sanga Padha Raja' (traditional head of 22 villages) was shot dead on 7 January, following a dispute over 3.16 acres of land in Jiarappa village under the Khunti Police Station area.

Adivasi Ulgulan Manch (AUM) convener Alastair Bodra alleged that the arrests were just an eyewash. "The killers are still free. We want them arrested," he said.

The police claimed to have arrested seven people in the case. — *PTI*

VILLAGERS KILL TEEN IN RANCHI FOR 'STEALING' PUMP

RANCHI, 17 JAN

A teenager was allegedly beaten to death by a group of villagers over suspicion of stealing a pump in Jharkhand's Ranchi district, police said on Saturday. Six persons have been arrested in this connection, an officer said.

The deceased has been identified as Vicky Nayak, 19, a resident of Chaya village within Burmu police station limits, around 50 km from here. Burmu OC Naveen Sharma said the victim was caught by a group of villagers on suspicion of stealing a pump.

Later, a panchayat meeting was held, during which he was beaten by villagers. He fainted on the spot, Sharma said. He was taken to Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) by his family, where doctors declared him brought dead.

"An FIR has been registered based on the statement of the victim's father. Based on this, police nabbed six persons," the OC said. — *PTI*

Kerala teen was raped and murdered: Police

MALAPPURAM, 17 JAN

The police confirmed on Saturday that a 16-year-old girl, whose body was recovered from Thodiyapalam near a railway track in this district, was raped and murdered.

Malappuram police chief Viswanadh R said that the teenager, who had gone missing from the Karuvarakundu area on Thursday, was raped and killed. Her body was found on Friday.

He said the victim's minor boyfriend was produced before the Juvenile Justice Board and shifted to a juvenile home on Saturday.

He said that the murder was committed following problems in the relationship. Viswanadh said the minor had mentioned another relationship of the victim.

The girl was strangled and both her hands were tied. He said that there was no involvement of any other person had been detected so far. Viswanadh said both the victim and the boy were studying in the same school, and their families were aware of the relationship.

He said the victim had contacted her mother on Thursday evening, and that the call was made from the boy's phone.

Viswanadh said the Juvenile Justice Board will decide whether the boy should be tried as an adult or a minor in this case. — *PTI*

US jails Indian for bid to sell aircraft parts to Russia

NEW DELHI/NEW YORK, 17 JAN

An Indian national, Sanjay Kaushik, 58, has been sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison in the US for conspiring to illegally export controlled aviation components to Russia.

The judgment, handed down earlier this week, was accompanied by a statement from Scott Bradford, US Attorney for the District of Oregon, who said Kaushik's actions were "deliberate and profit-driven."

Kaushik, who resides in Delhi, was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and 36 months of supervised release for conspiring to export aviation components, including a navigation and flight control system, in breach of the Export Control Reform Act.

According to court documents, from September 2023 Kaushik and others conspired to unlawfully acquire aerospace goods and technology from the US for Russian entities. The goods were purchased seemingly for Kaushik's company, but were in fact destined for Russian users. Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Eisenberg added: "Those who scheme to circumvent American export control laws especially when it involves technologies with military applications will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." — *PTI*

No bail for Mamkootathil in third 'sex assault' case

PATHANAMTHITTA, 17 JAN

A Kerala court on Saturday declined to grant bail to expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil in the third sexual assault case against him in which he was arrested last week.

The detailed order of the Thiruvalla Judicial First Class Magistrate court is awaited.

The Kerala High Court and a sessions court in Thiruvananthapuram had earlier protected the MLA from arrest in the first two cases of sexual assault booked based on complaints of two different women.

The third sexual assault case was recently booked against the MLA under Sections 376 (rape) and 506(1) (criminal intimidation) of the IPC following a complaint lodged by a native of Kottayam district on 8 January. He was arrested on 11 January in Palakkad. — *PTI*

- The third 'sexual assault' case was booked recently against Mamkootathil

Now, VHP protests against medical college in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, 17 JAN:

Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists staged a protest in Hazratganj here, alleging illegal religious conversion at the King George's Medical University (KGMU).

The protest held on Friday after police arrested King George's Medical University intern Mohammad Adil in an alleged rape and blackmail case involving a female nursing student.

Vishva Hindu Parishad workers took to the streets, raising slogans like "stop love jihad" and accusing the authorities of failing to curb what they claimed were 'suspicious activities'.

Police said Mohammad Adil was arrested on Thursday and sent to jail. — *PTI*

Acid attack on minor girl in Wayanad, man held

WAYANAD, 17 JAN

A 14-year-old girl suffered severe burns after her neighbour allegedly attacked her with acid here, police said on Saturday.

The accused, Raju Jose, 53, a resident of Priyadarshi Unathi, Marakavu, Pulpalli, has been arrested.

Police said the incident occurred on Friday when Jose allegedly poured acid on Mahalakshmi, a class 8 student living in the neighbourhood. Police said there were multiple issues between the neighbours that led to the incident.

The accused had recently asked the girl to give him her Student Police Cadet (SPC) uniform, which she had refused.

The victim was first taken to a nearby government hospital and later shifted to Kozhikode Medical College Hospital.

- The accused had recently asked the girl to give him her Student Police Cadet (SPC) uniform, which she had refused. He is being questioned to find out the exact motive

She suffered around 40 per cent burns, including injuries to her face, a police officer said.

The accused fled the scene after the attack but was arrested on Saturday. He is being interrogated to ascertain the exact motive behind the attack, police said. — *PTI*

JUDGE DIDN'T BELIEVE NUN

Injustice done in Kerala nun rape case, says new prosecutor

KOCHI, 17 JAN

The Special Public Prosecutor (SPP), appointed by the Kerala Government in the nun rape case against Bishop Franco Mulakkal, on Saturday said that "injustice" was done to the survivor n the matter.

Senior advocate B G Harindranath, who was appointed as SPP in the appeal filed by the victim-nun in the Kerala High Court, said that while he has not read the entire case material, from what he has seen, there were some "discrepancies" in it.

The senior lawyer said that it was not correct to see the victim as an accomplice, which is what happened in the lower court.

"The survivor was disbelieved by the court on the basis of the statements of others. I feel an injustice was done to the victim," Harindranath told a TV channel.

He said that the police had come to him six months ago seeking his consent to be an SPP.

The victim-nun had recently met Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to request the appointment of an SPP.

Franco Mulakkal, who was accused of rape by the nun, was acquitted by a local court in 2022. Later, he quit the Jalandhar Bishop post.

The victim has challenged the trial court's verdict in the Kerala High Court.

Meanwhile, the nun thanked the Kerala Government Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday for appointing an SPP to handle legal proceedings in the Kerala High Court. — *PTI*

Surgical blade left inside woman's bandage in Kerala

PATHANAMTHITTA, 17 JAN

A female pilgrim at Sabarimala has accused a government-run hospital in Pamba of medical negligence, claiming that a surgical blade was left inside the bandage on her leg.

The woman, who resides in Kochi, said she had submitted a complaint to the Pathanamthitta District Medical Officer (DMO) about the incident.

The confirmed that the woman reported the matter by phone on Friday evening. "A report has been requested from the hospital, and the incident is under investigation. Appropriate action will be taken based on the findings," the DMO added.

The pilgrim told a television channel that the staff member who attended to her wound initially attempted to use a surgical blade to cut her skin, but she requested that he simply apply a bandage, as she was uncomfortable with his actions.

Upon returning home in Kochi and changing the dressing, she discovered that a surgical blade had been wrapped inside the bandage around her leg. —*PTI*

One uprising, two stories: The war of narratives in Iran

Since the outbreak of the current wave of protests in Iran, two sharply competing narratives have emerged to explain what is unfolding in the streets.

For the ruling establishment, the unrest is portrayed as a foreign-engineered plot. They argue it is an externally-driven attempt to destabilise the state through manipulation, infiltration, and psychological operations.

For the opposition, the same events are framed as a nationwide uprising rooted in long-standing grievances. They argue the protests signal a rupture between society and the political system.

How the "story" of a conflict is told is a key component in warfare. The Iran protests are offering two very different stories.

A man hands out posters of the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a funeral ceremony for a group of security forces, who were killed during anti-government protests in Tehran **PHOTO: PTI**

NARRATIVE CRAFTING AS PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

In the digital age, psychological warfare has moved beyond conventional propaganda into the realm of what academics Ihsan Yilmaz and Shahram Akbarzadeh call Strategic Digital Information Operations (SDIOs).

Psychological operations function as central instruments of power, designed not only to suppress dissent but reshape how individuals perceive reality, legitimacy, and political possibility. Their objective is cognitive and emotional:

-to induce fear, uncertainty, and helplessness

-to discredit opponents

-to construct a sense of inevitability around a certain political scenario.

These techniques are employed not only by states, but increasingly by non-state actors as well.

Social media platforms have become the primary theatres of this psychological struggle. Hashtags, memes, manipulated images, and coordinated commenting – often amplified by automated accounts – are used to frame events, assign blame, and shape emotional responses at scale.

Crucially, audiences are not passive recipients of these narratives. Individuals sympathetic to a particular framing actively reproduce, reinforce, and police it within digital echo chambers. In this way, confirmation bias flourishes and alternative interpretations are dismissed or attacked.

Because of this, narrative control is not a secondary dimension of conflict but a central battleground. How an uprising is framed can shape its trajectory. It can determine whether it remains peaceful or turns violent, and whether domestic repression or foreign intervention comes to be seen as justified or inevitable.

THE IRANIAN REGIME'S NARRATIVE

The Iranian regime has consistently framed the current uprising as a foreign-engineered plot, orchestrated by Israel, the United States and allied intelligence services. In this narrative, the protests are not an expression of domestic grievance but a continuation of Israel's recent confrontation with Iran. This, it argues, is part of a broader campaign to overthrow the regime and turn the country into chaos.

Two weeks after the protests began, the state organised large pro-regime demonstrations. Shortly afterward, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared these rallies had "thwarted the plan of foreign enemies that was meant to be carried out by domestic mercenaries".

The message was clear: dissent was not only illegitimate but treasonous. Those participating in it were portrayed as instruments of external powers rather than citizens with political demands.

Demonising dissent serves a dual purpose. It is not only a method of silencing opposition, but also a tool for engineering perception and shaping emotional responses.

By portraying protesters as foreign agents, the regime seeks to manufacture compliance, discourage wavering supporters, and project an image of widespread popularity. The objective is not simply to punish critics, but to signal that public dissent will carry heavy costs.

To reinforce this narrative, pro-regime social media accounts have circulated content that blends ideological framing with selective factual material. Analyses arguing that events in Iran follow a familiar "regime change playbook" have been widely shared, as have Israeli statements suggesting intelligence operations inside Iran. Cherry-picking expert commentary or isolated data points to justify repression is a common feature of this approach.

The timing and amplification of such content are also significant. Social media networks are deployed via "algorithmic manipulation" to make the regime's framing go viral and marginalise counter views.

As this digital campaign unfolds, it is reinforced by more traditional forms of control. Internet restrictions and shutdowns limit access to alternative sources of information. This allows state media to dominate communications and thwart challenges to the official narrative.

In this environment, the regime's story functions not merely as propaganda, but as a strategic instrument. It aims to redefine the uprising, delegitimise dissent, and preserve authority by controlling how events are understood.

THE OPPOSITION NARRATIVE

The opposition is divided, but two main groups have appeared active in framing the opposition narrative: those who support an Iranian monarchy, and dissenting armed group Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK). Despite their differences, the two have contributed to the same story.

They have crafted a persuasive narrative, framing the uprising as a moral emergency requiring external intervention, particularly by the United States and Israel. This narrative does not represent all opposition voices, but it has gained visibility through social media, exile media outlets, and activist networks. Its core objective is to bring international attention to the conflict and put the case for, then bring about, regime change in Iran.

One central technique has been the legitimisation and encouragement of violence. Calls for armed protest and direct confrontation with security forces mark a clear shift away from demand-based, civilian mobilisation toward a violent uprising.

A high number of state forces casualties – reportedly more than 114 by 11 January– is an example of the effectiveness of this technique. This escalation is often justified as necessary to "keep the movement alive" and generate a level of bloodshed that would compel international intervention.

According to external conflict-monitoring assessments, clashes between armed protesters and state forces have in fact resulted in significant casualties on both sides.

A second technique involves the strategic inflation of casualty figures. Opposition platforms have claimed the death toll to be far higher than figures cited by independent estimates.

Such exaggeration serves a clear psychological and political purpose. It is intended to shock and sway international opinion, frame the situation as genocidal or exceptional, and increase pressure on foreign governments to act militarily. A third element has been the use of intimidation and rhetorical coercion. In some high-profile media appearances, opposition figures have openly threatened pro-regime commentators, warning of retribution once power changes hands.

This language serves multiple functions. It seeks to silence alternative viewpoints, project confidence and inevitability, and present the situation as one of good versus evil. At the same time, such rhetoric risks alienating undecided audiences and reinforcing regime claims the uprising will lead to chaos or revenge politics. These practices reveal how parts of the opposition have also embraced narrative warfare as a strategic tool. This narrative is used to amplify violence, inflate harm, and suppress competing interpretations. It aims to redefine the uprising not merely as a domestic revolt, but as a humanitarian and security crisis that demands foreign intervention.

In doing so, it mirrors the regime's own effort to weaponise storytelling in a conflict where perception is as consequential as power.

In different ways, both narratives ultimately sideline the protesters themselves. They reduce a diverse, grassroots movement into an instrument of power struggle, either to legitimise repression at home or justify intervention from abroad. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Air pollution increases risk of eye infection: Doctors

Air pollution is considered a reason for respiratory and cardiac problems. However, experts warn that it also increases the risk of eye infection and aggravates existing issues among those with ocular problems.

Doctors hold fine particulates, PM2.5, the main culprit for eye problems such as allergic conjunctivitis, scratches on the surface of the eyes, dryness, blurred vision, and increased sensitivity to light.

"Every winter, my clinic sees a rise in the number of people complaining of red, itchy, watery, and burning eyes. The main reason is high air pollution, especially fine particles known as PM2.5," said Dr Ajay Sharma, co-founder of Eye Q Eye Hospital.

PM2.5 includes tiny particulates from vehicle smoke, dust, burning waste, and firecrackers, he said, adding that these particles are so small that they easily enter the eyes and settle on the cornea, the clear front layer of the eye.

Solid particles irritate and scratch the eye's surface, while liquid particles carry chemicals that mix with tears and weaken their natural protection, the doctor said.

"Because of this, many people experience dryness, irritation, blurred vision, and increased sensitivity to light. Children, elderly people, office-goers, and patients who have had recent eye surgery are especially affected during the winter smog," Dr Sharma said.

Dr Taru Dewan, the head of the department of ophthalmology at RML hospital, said that air pollution during winters is particularly troublesome as smog keeps lingering.

"As the smog engulfs us, the eyes face the brunt alongwith respiratory illnesses. We are getting many allergic conjunctivitis patients with varying severity. Moreover, cases of eye dryness worsen due to exposure to smoke," she said.

The risk of ocular infection exacerbates when unclean hands rub the eyes, the doctor highlighted. "I advise my patients to avoid exposure to a polluted environment as far as possible and maintain hygiene. It seems difficult for individuals to control pollution, but at least efforts to minimise the generation of pollutants at their level can help. If everyone becomes conscious, then collective efforts will show the way."

Eyes, being exposed organs, tend to get directly impacted by pollution, with the most common symptom being allergic in nature.

"This is known as allergic conjunctivitis, which manifests as redness, irritation and watering. Pollution can also aggravate dry eyes, more common in people staring at screens for long hours and those using contact lenses," said Dr Umesh Bareja, senior consultant, ophthalmology at Sitaram Bhartia Hospital.

He flagged smoking as a major reason for the inner structures of the eyes getting affected. "Even passive smoking can affect eye health. Smoking has been linked to increased chances of cataract, glaucoma, uveitis and macular degeneration," the doctor said.

The only solution is public awareness and special policy initiatives to curb vehicular and industrial pollution, burning of trash and coal, deforestation, and regulation of construction activity, Dr Bareja said, adding that tobacco smoking should be avoided at any cost. Dr JS Bhalla, North India Representative in the Scientific Committee of All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS), explained that outdoor and indoor air pollution is derived from different sources and can cause eye diseases.

"Among air pollutants, high levels of PM2.5, while associated with Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and stroke, can also contribute to adult and childhood glaucoma," the doctor said.

"We are witnessing about a 30 per cent increase in patients with dry eyes in the OPD," said Dr Bhalla, who is also a senior consultant at Perfect Eye Centre, Delhi.

Dr Anshika Luthra Sharma, Ophthalmologist and Cornea, Cataract, and Refractive Surgeon at Eye Q Eye Hospital, said, "The good news is that simple precautions can make a big difference."

She recommended wearing wrap-around glasses when stepping out of the home and washing the face and eyes with clean water after returning home.

One should avoid rubbing their eyes, even if they itch and stay well-hydrated while limiting outdoor exposure on high-pollution days. If discomfort persists, one should consult an eye specialist instead of self-medicating, Dr Sharma said."Pollution may be unavoidable, but protecting our eyes is very much in our control," she added.

—PTI

Solid particles irritate and scratch the eye's surface, while liquid particles carry chemicals that mix with tears and weaken their natural protection **PHOTO: PTI**

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Despite Thackerays' late reunion, BJP outpaces them to win Mumbai

- The tactical alliance between Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) may not have delivered control of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), but it succeeded in preserving the Thackeray cousins' traditional Marathi-speaking strongholds, even as the BJP emerged as the dominant force in Mumbai's civic politics.

The tactical alliance between Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) may not have delivered control of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), but it succeeded in preserving the Thackeray cousins' traditional Marathi-speaking strongholds, even as the BJP emerged as the dominant force in Mumbai's civic politics.

Breaking nearly three decades of dominance by the undivided Shiv Sena, the BJP on Friday emerged victorious in the BMC elections. Results for all 227 wards were declared around midnight. The BJP won 89 seats, while its ally Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde secured 29. The Shiv Sena (UBT) finished with 65 seats and the MNS managed six.

Among other parties, the Congress, contesting in alliance with the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi, won 24 seats. AIMIM secured eight, the NCP three, the Samajwadi Party two, and the NCP (SP) just one seat.

The Shiv Sena (UBT)-MNS combine managed to retain pockets of influence in Marathi-speaking bastions across civic wards in Mahim, Sewree and Worli in south Mumbai, as well as Bhandup and Vikhroli in the eastern suburbs. These areas have historically been loyal to the Thackeray brand of politics.

However, the alliance failed to make any electoral impact in the satellite cities of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), including Thane, Kalyan-Dombivli, Mira-Bhayander, Bhiwandi-Nizampur, Ulhasnagar, Navi Mumbai, Vasai-Virar and Panvel — one of the country's most urbanised belts. The pact also failed to register gains in major cities such as Nashik and Pune.

Elections were held across 29 municipal corporations in the state. Voting took place on Thursday, with counting completed on Friday.

The alliance was forged only days before the January 15 civic polls, following the disastrous performance of both parties in the 2024 Maharashtra assembly elections. The Shiv Sena (UBT) won just 20 seats, while the MNS failed to open its account.

Uddhav Thackeray and MNS president Raj Thackeray set aside their two-decade-old rivalry, rooted in competing claims to the 'Marathi manoos' legacy, in what was projected as a move for the betterment of Maharashtra.

Political analyst Prakash Akolkar, author of a book on the Shiv Sena, said the cousins failed to capitalise on the political momentum generated by their reconciliation. He blamed both leaders for insufficient campaigning in the run-up to the polls.

Uddhav Thackeray and MNS President Raj Thackeray set aside their two-decade-old rivalry in what was projected as a move for the betterment of Maharashtra **PHOTO: PTI**

Akolkar noted that the cousins came together publicly for the first time on July 5, 2025, during celebrations after the BJP-led Mahayuti government withdrew controversial government resolutions linked to the three-language formula and the mandatory introduction of Hindi for Classes 1 to 5. While the moment generated significant buzz, he said it was squandered.

"The momentum was there, but it was not converted into votes," Akolkar observed.

Contrary to their own announcement of holding multiple joint rallies, the Thackerays addressed only three — in Mumbai, Nashik and Thane. The original plan involved nine rallies across Mumbai, Kalyan, Dombivli, Mira-Bhayander, Thane, Pune and Nashik.

Instead, both leaders focused on visiting local 'shakhas' of their parties in an attempt to establish a personal connect with voters. "Visiting shakhas may not necessarily help you connect with new voters," Akolkar said.

An MNS leader echoed this view, noting that Raj Thackeray's lone rally, where he delivered a presentation critical of industrialists, created significant public attention. "There should have been more such rallies," the leader said.

According to the MNS leader, the primary objective behind the alliance was to consolidate Marathi votes and revive the two parties after the assembly poll debacle. "The MNS was on a ventilator and we wanted it to be off. The Shiv Sena (UBT), which is in the ICU, could at least be shifted to the general ward," he remarked.

Founded by Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena first captured power in the BMC in 1997, winning 103 seats and dislodging the Congress. In the 2017 civic elections, the undivided Shiv Sena emerged as the single largest party with 84 seats, narrowly ahead of the BJP's 82.

Since the 2022 split in the Shiv Sena, Uddhav Thackeray's faction has witnessed sustained desertions. More than half of the Sena's 2017 BMC corporators switched allegiance to the Eknath Shinde-led faction, severely weakening Uddhav Thackeray's civic base.

The MNS, which had won seven seats in 2017, was reduced to a single corporator after defections. An MNS leader claimed the party was disadvantaged during seat-sharing talks, alleging it was allotted difficult seats dominated by the BJP. Political observers said the results mark a decisive shift in Mumbai's civic power structure, with the BJP firmly consolidating its footprint in the financial capital and the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena struggling to retain its once-unassailable bastion. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Syrian forces enter Deir Hafer after Kurdish withdrawal

HAMIMA, 17 JAN

Syrian government forces entered the outskirts of a northern town on Saturday morning after the commander of Kurdish-led fighters said it would evacuate the area in an apparent move to avoid conflict. This came after deadly clashes erupted earlier this month between government troops and the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the city of Aleppo. The Syrian military said on Saturday morning its forces were in full control of Deir Hafer, had captured the Jarrah airbase east of the town, and were working on removing all mines and explosives. Over the past two days, more than 11,000 people fled Deir Hafer and Maskana. Dozens have been killed since fighting broke out. *—PTI*

Ban Chinese from nation's labs: US lawmakers

WASHINGTON, 16 JAN

A group of eleven US senators has urged Energy Secretary Chris Wright to impose an outright ban on Chinese citizens working inside America's national laboratories, warning that their presence could weaken the US strategic advantage in the global race for artificial intelligence (AI). The senators warned that Chinese access to these facilities poses a significant security risk, and stated that around 3,200 Chinese nationals received clearance to work at these labs in the 2024 fiscal year. Their appeal follows a House investigation released in December, which found that US-funded research in sensitive fields such as quantum and AI was being conducted jointly with Chinese institutions. National labs are research institutions in the US. *—ANI*

Uganda Prez wins elections amid internet outage

KAMPALA, 17 JAN

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni won his seventh term with 71.65 per cent of votes, according to official results Saturday, defeating the youthful challenger who campaigned for change after four decades of the same government. The musician-turned-politician best known as Bobi Wine took 24.72 per cent of the vote, the final results showed. Wine's party had alleged he was arrested ahead of the results, which police denied. The election took place amid an internet blackout. Wine is expected to reject the outcome, as he has earlier condemned what he calls an unfair electoral process, due to military deployments and alleged abductions of his poling agents. *—PTI*

14, including 6 children, die in Pakistan accident

LAHORE, 17 JAN

At least 14 people, including six children, were killed on Saturday when a truck carrying passengers fell from a bridge due to dense fog in Pakistan's Punjab province, officials said. The accident occurred in the early hours in Kot Momin tehsil of Sargodha district, about 200 km from Lahore. The truck was carrying 23 people, mostly members of an extended family travelling from Islamabad to Faisalabad to attend a funeral. According to Punjab Emergency Services Rescue 1122, the motorway was closed because of heavy fog, forcing the truck to take a local route. The driver lost control due to poor visibility, causing the vehicle to plunge from the Galapur bridge into a dry canal. Six children and five women were among the dead, while nine others were injured. *—PTI*

Blair, Rubio, named in Gaza's 'Board of Peace'

US Gen to head International Stabilisation Force for security

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

Tony Blair; Marco Rubio; Jared Kushner; Ajay Banga; Marc Rowan; & Steve Witkoff *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Former British prime minister Tony Blair, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Indian-American President of the World Bank Group, Ajay Banga are among the leaders named to the 'Board of Peace' for Gaza redevelopment. US President Donald Trump heads the Board.

The White House on Friday released a list of appointed members to the founding Executive Board of the Board of Peace, which it said comprises leaders with "experience across diplomacy, development, infrastructure, and economic strategy".

The Executive Board also includes US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, private equity firm Apollo Global Management CEO Marc Rowan and US Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gabriel.

Each member will have a defined portfolio, comprising of governance capacity-building, regional relations, reconstruction, investment attraction, large-scale funding, and capital mobilisation, the White House said.

Additional members will be announced soon.

Major General Jasper Jeffers, Commander of the US Special Operations Command Central, has been appointed Commander of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF). He will lead security operations, support comprehensive demilitarisation and enable the delivery of humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials, the White House said.

Trump has called on all parties to cooperate fully with the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), the Board of Peace, and the ISF.

The NCAG has been described as a vital step in implementing Phase-II of Trump's 20-point plan to end the Gaza conflict. The NCAG will be led by Palestinian Authority leader Ali Sha'ath

According to the plan, Israeli forces will withdraw to an agreed upon point and battle lines will remain frozen until conditions are met for a complete staged withdrawal.

The initiative also envisages a "Trump economic development plan" to rebuild Gaza by convening a panel of experts involved in developing modern "miracle cities" in the Middle East. It also proposes the establishment of a special economic zone with preferential tariffs with participating countries. As per the plan, investment proposals and development ideas from international groups will be considered. *—PTI*

Women cross a street under a huge banner showing hands firmly holding Iranian flags as a sign of patriotism, in Tehran *PHOTO: PTI*

Uneasy quiet on Iranian streets after crackdown

DUBAI, 17 JAN

Iran's protests against the theocracy and the falling economy appear to have been completely stifled after a massive crackdown, as an uneasy calm prevailed across the country.

The death toll stood at 3,090, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, said, noting that the toll was likely to be significantly higher and would likely rise. The internet and communication remained on Saturday.

US President Donald Trump, who had earlier threatened to strike Iran if it kills protesters, thank the regime for not executing the at least 800 people detained and set for trial. "I greatly respect the fact that they cancelled" the executions, Trump said in Washington.

However, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, a senior hard-line Iranian cleric, on Friday called for the death penalty to be delivered to the protesters in an address aired on state media.

Meanwhile, exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi called for foreign intervention to overthrow the regime. He urged protesters to take to the streets from Saturday to Monday.

'TRUMP IS A CRIMINAL'

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday branded Trump a "criminal" for supporting protesters. He also said that "several thousands" were killed in the protests, the first acknowledgements of casualties from the regime.Khamenei called the protesters "foot soldiers of the US" with live ammunition, but said that he did not want to take Iran to war. *—PTI*

Hindu man crushed to death in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI/DHAKA, 17

A Hindu man was crushed to death in Bangladesh after he tried to stop a vehicle from leaving a petrol pump without paying for fuel.

The incident, which took place on Friday in Rajbari district, marks the latest in a spate of violence targeting Hindus in Bangladesh.

The victim, identified as 30-year-old Ripon Saha, was a fuel station worker, police officials said.

He was working at Karim Filling Station in Goalanda Mor, it said.

"The worker stood in front of the car after they refused to pay for fuel, and they ran him over before fleeing." Rajbari Sadar Police chief Khondakar Ziaur Rahman said.

According to police and eyewitnesses, a black SUV driver attempted to leave without paying, Saha tried to block the vehicle.

The car allegedly ran him over and sped away, killing him on the spot. Police seized the vehicle and arrested its owner, Abul Hashem alias Sujan, 55, and his driver Kamal Hossain, 43. *—PTI*

Russia's recent bombartment of Ukraine's energy sector has forced Kyiv to put in place emergency measures *PHOTO: UKRAINE EMERGECY SERVICE*

Ukraine to discuss peace deal in US amid outages

KYIV, 17 JAN

A Ukrainian delegation arrived in the US for talks on Saturday on a US-led diplomatic push to end the nearly 4-year-old war as Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid cut electricity and heating in freezing temperatures.

Kyrylo Budanov, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Chief of Staff, said he arrived in the US to discuss "the details of the peace agreement."

Budanov said he, together with Ukrainian negotiators would meet with US envoy Steve Witkoff, President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and US Army Secretary Dan Driscoll.

Zelenskyy said on Friday that the delegation would try to finalise postwar security guarantees and economic recovery.

Zelenskyy may meet Trump in Davos for the World Economic Forum.

Ukraine has introduced emergency measures, including temporarily easing curfew restrictions to allow people to go whenever they need to public heating centers set up by the authorities. *—PTI*

EU, Mercosur to sign agri deal amid farmer outrage

RIO DE JANEIRO, 17 JAN

Before Saturday's signing of the major free trade agreement between the European Union and the South American trade bloc- Mercosur, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met on Friday to commemorate the upcoming milestone.

The agreement has sparked strong opposition from European farmers, particularly in France, Italy and Greece, who say it would threaten their livelihoods by opening EU markets to cheaper agricultural imports.

The pact, one of the world's largest free trade agreements, covers around 720 million people, bringing together Brazil and Argentina alongside Paraguay and Uruguay, with Bolivia able to join later. The deal grants South American exporters access to the EU market for products such as instant coffee, poultry, and orange juice.

Lula will skip Saturday's signing in Asunción, with Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira representing Brazil instead. *—PTI*

A BOILING POT

FAA warns of military activities near Mexico, South America

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

PHOTO: X

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has urged US aircraft operators to "exercise caution" when flying over the eastern Pacific Ocean near Mexico, Central America and parts of South America, citing "military activities" and satellite navigation interference.

The warning was issued in a series of Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) issued by the FAA on Friday.

They say, "Potential risks exist for aircraft at all altitudes, including during overflight and the arrival and departure phases of flight." Such notices are issued routinely in any region where there are hostilities nearby.

The notices come after nearly four months of US military strikes against boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific that Washington alleged were trafficking drugs.

After 35 known strikes that killed at least 115 people, according to the Trump administration, the US conducted a "large-scale strike" against Venezuela and "arrested" leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores over drug trafficking charges.

The US then threatened several Latin American countries, including Mexico, Cuba and Colombia. *—PTI*

Feds in Minneapolis can't detain protesters, use tear gas: Judge

MINNEAPOLIS, 17 JAN

Federal officers in the Minneapolis-area can't detain or tear gas peaceful protesters, a judge in Minnesota ruled on Friday. Minneapolis has seen the largest recent US immigration enforcement operation, with one person shot dead by an officer, resulting in massive protests.

US District Judge Kate Menendez ruled in a case filed in December on behalf of six Minnesota activists.

The ruling prohibits the officers from detaining drivers and passengers in vehicles when there is no reasonable suspicion they are obstructing or interfering with the officers.

NAT'L GUARD TO STAY IN DC THROUGH 2026

National Guard troops will be on the streets of Washington, DC, until the end of the year, according to a memo.

The Guard has about 2,400 troops in Washington. Troops have been tasked with patrolling the streets and picking up trash. *—PIT*

Republicans deny Don, back Fed Chair

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

Several Republican Senators are defending the independence of the Federal Reserve Chair, splitting from President Donald Trump's attempts to sack Jerome Powell for not to bending to his will.

Trump has been demanding that Powell slashes the interest rate, calling the Fed Chair incompetent when he refused and mobilising the legal system against him.

"I know Powell very well. I will be stunned if he has done anything wrong," said GOP Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana, one of Trump's allies in the Senate.

Similarly, Senator Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, has vowed to combat any Trump administration nominees until the legal cloud surrounding the chair is resolved. Others followed suit.

Trump tried to fire another Fed board member, Lisa Cook, but the Supreme Court intervened. *—PTI*

Senators flag India's 30% tariffs on pulses

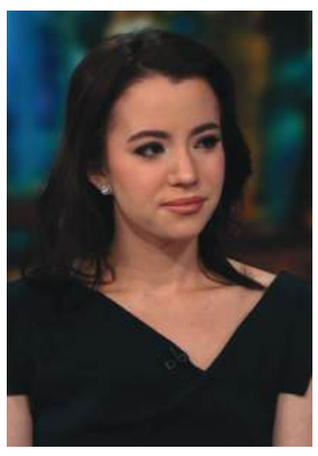
Two US lawmakers asked Trump to urge India to reduce its tariffs on American pulses. Republican Senators Steve Daines and Kevin Cramer wrote to Trump and said India imposed an "unfair tariff" of 30 per cent on yellow peas. They also sought to sell crops like lentils, chickpeas, dried beans and peas to India.

Egypt, Sudan want US help on Ethiopia dam

Egypt and Sudan welcomed Trump's offer on Friday to resume US mediation efforts with Ethiopia to resolve a long-running Nile River water dispute following the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Africa's largest. Ehypt fears the dam will cut water to its arid population, while Sudan fears floods.

'HUMILIATED IN A NIGHTMARE'

Mother of Musk's child sues xAI over Grok sexual deepfakes



NEW YORK, 17 JAN

Alleging humiliation and emotional distress by the Grok chatbot that allowed users to generate sexually exploitive deepfake images of her, the mother of one of billionaire Elon Musk's children has sued his AI company.

"I have suffered and continue to suffer serious pain and mental distress as a result of xAI's role in creating and distributing these digitally altered images of me," alleged **Ashley St Clair**, 27, in a document attached to a lawsuit she filed in the state Supreme Court on Thursday in New York City against xAI.

"I am humiliated and feel like this nightmare will never stop so long as Grok continues to generate these images of me," Ashley St Clair, mother of Musk's 16-month-old son, Romulus, who lives in New York City, said.

She is seeking an undisclosed amount of damages for alleged infliction of emotional distress and other claims, as well as court orders immediately barring xAI from allowing more deepfakes of her.

Ashley St Clair, who describes herself as a writer and political strategist, alleges in her lawsuit against xAI that the images have included a photo of her fully dressed at age 14 that was altered to show her in a bikini, and others showing her as an adult in sexualised positions and wearing a bikini with swastikas. St Clair is Jewish. Grok is on Musk's social media platform X.

Lawyers and media contacts for xAI did not immediately comment on Friday. On Wednesday, following global backlash, X announced that Grok would no longer be able to edit photos to portray real people in revealing clothing, in places where that is illegal. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

Assam-based firm gets Vande Bharat catering deal

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

An Assam-based luxury hospitality brand has secured the catering contract for India's first Vande Bharat Sleeper Train, marking a first for a Northeast-based firm on a premium overnight service. Mayfair Spring Valley Resort has partnered with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) to provide onboard meals on the Howrah–Guwahati (Kamakhya) route, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off from Malda Town in north Bengal. Passengers will be served vegetarian dishes from West Bengal and Assam, prepared using locally sourced ingredients. The menu includes basanti pulao, cholar dal, Assamese joha rice, seasonal vegetables and regional sweets. Designed for overnight travel. —*PTI*

IREDA arm sanctions first int'l green loan

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Ireda Global Green Energy Finance IFSC Ltd (IGGEFIL) will provide a USD 22.5 million green loan to Swarna Solar Ltd for a 100 MW solar power project in Zambia, the company said on Saturday. IGGEFIL, a wholly owned subsidiary of the state-run Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA), approved its first international loan at a board meeting in New Delhi on Friday. The funding will support the development of a 100 MW photovoltaic solar plant in Serenje district, Central Province. IREDA chairman and managing director Pradip Kumar Das said the sanction marked a key milestone, positioning IREDA as a global catalyst for clean energy finance through its presence at GIFT City—*PTI*

UCO Bank to seek SEBI extension on dilution

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

State-owned UCO Bank, awaiting favorable market conditions to raise capital, will seek an extension from SEBI to meet the minimum public shareholding requirement, as the government is unlikely to reduce its stake to 25 per cent by the 1August, 2026 deadline, CEO Ashwani Kumar said. The government currently holds 90.95 per cent of the bank. The board has approved a QIP of up to Rs 2,700 crore, with an offer for sale also under consideration. In Q3 FY26, net profit rose 15.65 per cent to Rs 739 crore, supported by steady growth, improved margins, and stronger asset quality. Gross NPAs fell to 2.41 per cent, net NPAs to 0.36 per cent, while domestic NIM reached 3.27 per cent. Retail lending is robust, and corporateloans are growing selectively—*PTI*

ICICI Bank sees profit decline In December quarter

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

Private sector lender ICICI Bank reported a 2.68 per cent decline in consolidated net profit for the December 2025 quarter, at Rs 12,537.98 crore, down from Rs 12,883.37 crore a year earlier. On a standalone basis, profit after tax rose to Rs 11,318 crore. Core net interest income increased 7.7 per cent to Rs 21,932 crore, driven by 11.5 per cent loan growth and a slight rise in net interest margin to 4.30 per cent. Non-interest income, excluding treasury operations, rose 12.4 per cent to Rs 7,525 crore. The bank set aside Rs 145 crore following new labour codes, while overall provisions doubled to Rs 2,556 crore, including a Rs 1,283 crore standard asset provision mandated by the Reserve Bank for agricultural loans after a supervisory review. —*PTI*

Maruti invests Rs 35,000 cr in Gujarat production unit

The plant will produce 10L cars yearly, create 12,000 jobs

GANDHINAGAR, 17 JAN

The firm's Gujarat plant will be set up on 1,750 acres of land Maruti Suzuki India Limited will develop a new plant in Khoraj, investing Rs 35,000 crores to produce a total of 10 lakh cars per year. About 12,000 people will get potential employment opportunities.

In the presence of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Maruti Suzuki MD Shriyut Hitachi Takeuchi, an investment letter handover ceremony was held between the state government and Maruti Suzuki India Limited in Gandhinagar.

Gujarat has taken another solid step towards realising the goal of Make in India Made for the World.

The Maruti Suzuki India plant in Gujarat will be set up on 1,750 acres of land provided by Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC).

Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghvi and Maruti Suzuki Whole Time Director and Executive Committee Member Sunil Kakkar were also present on this occasion.

Maruti Suzuki MD Hisashi Takeuchi hands over the letter of investment to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel in Gandhinagar *PHOTO: PTI*

Maruti Suzuki began operations in 1983 with its first production facility in Gurugram, Haryana.

Over the years, the company expanded its manufacturing footprint, including facilities in Gurugram, Manesar, and Kharkhoda in Haryana, and recently amalgamated the Gujarat plant into its operations.

Today, Maruti Suzuki manufactures 17 models and over 650 variants across these state-of-the-art facilities. Looking ahead, the Company plans to enhance its manufacturing capacity to 4 million units per annum to meet rising domestic demand and serve international markets.

Maruti Suzuki India has produced over 22.55 lakh units in 2025, its highest-ever production in a calendar year, according to a statement from the carmaker.

This is the second consecutive year that the automobile company has exceeded 20 lakh units in annual production. The production includes vehicles for domestic sales, exports and (original equipment manufacturer) OEM supplies.

The top five models by production volume during the year were Fronx, Baleno, Swift, Dzire and Ertiga. —*ANI*

FOR EXPORT GROWTH

GTRI calls for rehaul of tariff structure to boost trade

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

India's import tariff structure and customs administration requires an overhaul to reduce trade costs, strengthen manufacturing competitiveness and revive export growth, amid high US tariffs, Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

The US tariffs are affecting India's exports across various sectors leading to increased costs and potential shifts in trade dynamics.

The think tank in its report, 'A Blueprint for Modernizing India's Import Tariffs and Customs Regime' recommended movement toward zero duty on most industrial raw materials and key intermediates, while adopting a low standard duty of around 5 per cent on finished industrial goods.

Inverted duty structures must be eliminated as inputs are taxed more than finished products.

Tariff reform should be based on total import duty, not just headline basic customs duty.

India's merchandise trade has crossed USD 1.16 trillion and 29 per cent of gross domestic product flows through customs clearances.Custom duties now account for just 6 per cent of gross tax revenue and only 3.9 per cent of the value of imports, it added.

The distribution of tariff revenue is highly skewed as nearly 90 per cent of import value is concentrated in fewer than 10 per cent of tariff lines or product categories, while the bottom 60 per cent of tariff lines generate under 3 per cent of customs revenue.Customs rules and processes must be eased to help traders comply with the provisions smoothly.

The government must also issue self-contained notifications that clearly state their full impact. —*PTI*

The jute association said that the availability of raw jute has sharply declined, with stocks reducing by 1.25 lakh bales in December *PHOTO: PTI*

Jute mills push for private trading ban

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

The Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) has sought the Centre's urgent intervention to control spiralling prices of raw jute and ensure availability of the fibre, proposing a complete ban on raw jute trading by private traders after 31 March.

In a letter to Jute Commissioner Amrit Raj, the association said that the availability of raw jute with mills has sharply decreased, with stocks declining by around 1.25 lakh bales in December 2025 alone, even as prices surged to an unprecedented Rs 13,000 per quintal for South Bengal TDN-3 grade.

To arrest price escalation, IJMA proposed that traders, dealers, stockists and agencies be given time till 31 March to liquidate their raw jute stocks, after which any private trading in raw jute would become illegal.

During this period, mills are expected to consume around 12-15 lakh bales, enabling them to hold stocks of nearly 7 lakh bales within the prescribed limits by the end of March 2026.

IJMA suggested that the balance quantity be tendered to the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) at prices fixed by the government, with the corporation subsequently supplying jute to mills based on linkage with B-Twill orders from April onwards.

The association said the proposed framework would help stabilise raw jute prices, ensure uninterrupted fibre supply to mills, and secure the availability of jute bags for the Rabi Marketing Season 2026-27. The proposal follows discussions held on 14 January between the West Bengal Labour Minister, Deputy Jute Commissioner, trade unions and industry representatives. —*PTI*

'India-EU FTA to boost textiles, pharma, engineering'

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, engineering goods, gems and jewellery exports will benefit from the free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union, according to exporters.

The conclusion of negotiations is likely to be announced on 27 January.

With tariffs having been phased out due to the FTA, exports to the EU will double over the next three years.

The FTA would provide a stable and predictable framework for exporters, allowing Indian firms to plan long-term investments, integrate into European value chains, and secure market access.

Successive negotiations have emphasised sectors where India has a strong export footprint in the EU.

Textiles and apparel attract 12-16 per cent import duty in the EU, which makes Indian goods less competitive.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The average import duty for ready-made garments in the EU is 12 per cent, which apparently comes to 9.6 per cent as India enjoys preferential access.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations said substantial increases in US tariffs are affecting a spectrum of Indian exports, and it underscores the need for diversification of export markets and trade strategies.

The EU remains one of India's largest trading partners, accounting for about 17 per cent of India's goods exports and a significant share of services trade.

Bilateral goods trade between India and the EU was approximately USD 136.5 billion in 2024-25, with India exporting roughly USD 75.8 billion to the EU. —*PTI*

HDFC Bank registers Rs 19,807 cr profit

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

HDFC Bank on Saturday said its consolidated profit jumped 12.17 per cent to Rs 19,807 crore in the December quarter.

The city-headquartered lender had reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 17,657 crore in the year-ago period and Rs 19,611 crore in the preceding September quarter.

Private sector lender YES Bank also reported a 55 per cent jump in profit to Rs 952 crore in the December quarter, aided by a sharp fall in provisions.

The bank had reported a net profit of Rs 612 crore in the year-ago period and Rs 654 crore in the preceding September quarter.

YES Bank had to make a Rs 155-crore provision because of the implementation of new labour codes towards gratuity.

RBL Bank, has reported a 555 per cent jump in the December quarter net profit to Rs 214 crore, helped by a decline in provisions. It reported a net profit of Rs 33 crore in the year-ago period. —*PTI*

Reliance acquires Brylcreem, Toni & Guy

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL), the FMCG arm of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries, has acquired global rights to several international personal care brands, including Brylcreem, Toni & Guy and Badedas, to strengthen its presence in the beauty and grooming market. It has also acquired Matey, a UK-based children's personal care brand, according to an investor presentation.

The company has not disclosed financial details but said the brands will be expanded in both Indian and international markets. RCPL said it has secured global rights to these heritage brands, with a few territorial exclusions.

Brylcreem is a well-established British men's grooming brand, while Toni & Guy is a premium hair care label that evolved from its salon roots. Badedas is a German premium personal care brand known for products with natural plant extracts.

RCPL, which became a direct subsidiary of Reliance Industries in December 2025, is among India's fastest-growing FMCG companies. —*PTI*

CRISIL flags strong headwinds for Indian exports

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

Ratings firm CRISIL said that merchandise exports are likely to be buffeted by stronger headwinds due to the continuing impasse on the US-India trade deal and the fear of further levies by America for the purchase of Russian crude oil.

In its latest report, CRISIL said that in the near term, tea and basmati rice could face some pressure because of the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff by the US on countries trading with Iran.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The report said that the current account deficit (CAD) is expected to remain manageable because of a robust services trade surplus, healthy remittances and softer crude oil prices.

The ratings firm said the CAD is expected to be one per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) this financial year, with a mild uptick, but still within the safe zone, to 1.6 per cent in the financial year 2026-27.

With the merchandise exports growth rate lagging imports, the merchandise trade deficit widened to USD25 billion in December 2025, from USD20 billion a year earlier. , Exports to the US decelerated to 1.8 per cent year-on-year in December. —*PTI*

'Electronics lead PLI scheme with 146% jump'

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Electronics manufacturing, especially of mobile phones, leads in the Performance Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, with production rising 146 per cent to Rs 5.45 lakh crore in 2025, the CareEdge Ratings stated.

The rise in production was aided by USD 4 billion FDI inflows, 70 per cent of which came to PLI beneficiaries.

However, the total budgetary outlay towards the PLI scheme covering 14 sectors stands at Rs 1.97 lakh crore. In contrast, the aggregate PLI disbursements up to September 2025 stood low at Rs 23,946 crore.

PHOTO: PTI

While Rs 10,112 crore in incentives was disbursed during FY25, Rs 19,742 crore in disbursements is expected during FY26.

Cumulative investments and incremental production of Rs 2 lakh crore and over Rs 18.7 lakh crore respectively were achieved till September 2025. Traditional manufacturing sectors have also been covered. —*PTI*

ALLEGES FRAUD

Musk seeks $134B from OpenAI, Microsoft

SAN FRANCISCO/ REDMOND, 17 JAN

Billionaire Elon Musk has filed a major lawsuit asking a US federal court to pay him between USD 79 billion and USD 134 billion in damages from OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging the companies defrauded him by abandoning OpenAI's original nonprofit mission and entering a profit-driven partnership with Microsoft, sources said.

According to the sources, his lawyer detailed the damages in a court filing on Friday, a day after the federal judge dismissed OpenAI and Microsoft's final bid for avoiding trial.

In a recent court filing, Musk's legal team cites calculations by expert financial economist C Paul Wazzan, arguing that Musk is entitled to a share of OpenAI's estimated USD 500 billion valuation after Musk was cheated by OpenAI of around USD 38 million seed money he donated to the at the time it was founded, said sources.

The filing also said Musk provided business advice, helped recruit talent, and lent credibility to OpenAI's early efforts. Sources said that OpenAI warned its investors on how Musk will create "attention-grabbing" allegations.

Microsoft has declined to comment.

- The filing also said Musk provided business advice, helped recruit talent, and lent credibility to OpenAI's early efforts. OpenAI warned investors against Musk.

Wazzan's analysis estimates that OpenAI improperly benefited by USD 65.5 billion to USD 109.4 billion from Musk's involvement, with Microsoft gaining an additional USD 13.3 billion to USD 5.06 billion through its relationship with the startup. Musk's lawyers argue these "wrongful gains" should be returned to him, and he will seek punitive damages if the court finds the companies liable. —*Agencies*

Tesla gets more time in US probe into self-driving tech

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

US regulators have granted a five-week extension for Tesla to respond to allegations that its vehicles have broken traffic laws while operating in what the electric automaker calls "full self-driving" mode.

An investigation of Tesla's full-self driving feature was opened in October after the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration said it had collected dozens of reports of the cars running red lights or driving on the wrong side of the road, sometimes crashing into other vehicles and causing injuries.

The investigation covered 2.9 million vehicles, essentially all Teslas equipped with full self-driving technology, or

FSD. Critics say the name is a misnomer that has lulled drivers into handing full control over to their cars. The federal agency responsible for auto safety said in a letter to Tesla on 3 December, 2025 that it was investigating 62 complaints, up from 58 reported incidents in October.

Tesla has repeatedly told drivers the system cannot drive the cars by itself. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Vijender appointed to Asian Boxing Council

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Indian boxing icon Vijender Singh on Saturday was appointed as a member of the Asian Boxing Council, marking another significant milestone in his journey from an elite athlete to a global sports administrator.

Vijender, India's first Olympic medallist in boxing, brings with him nearly two decades of experience at the highest level of the sport, both in amateur and professional boxing. His appointment to the Asian Boxing Council reflects his deep understanding of the sport and his continued commitment to its growth across the continent.

Speaking on the development, Vijender said, "I am honoured to be appointed as a member of the Asian Boxing Council. I would like to thank the Boxing Federation of India and its leadership for entrusting me with this responsibility.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

An Se Young and Christie storm into final at India Open

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

World number one An Se Young continued her imperious run, while Indonesia's Jonatan Christie showed his trademark resilience as they advanced to the women's and men's singles finals respectively at the USD 950,000 India Open Super 750 tournament here on Saturday. Top seed and defending champion An Se Young, who has already won 11 titles this season and claimed the Malaysia Open Super 1000 last week, was in complete control as she swept past former world champion Ratchanok Intanon of Thailand 21-11, 21-7 in the women's singles semifinals. "Every match is a new feeling. I feel pressure, but I try not to think about my feelings.—*PTI*

Damien Martyn returns home from hospital

MELBOURNE, 17 JAN

Former Australian batter Damien Martyn on Saturday returned home from the hospital after recovering from an "awful" meningitis attack, which he said made him realise "how fragile life is." Martyn was taken ill on 27 December, 2025, and had to be put in an induced coma in the intensive care unit, but showed signs of recovery in the first week of January. However, the ordeal is now behind him. "Bring on 2026 ...I'm back! So happy to be home, to be able to put my feet in the sand on the beach and to start thanking all those people that reached out to my family in their unwavering support.—*PTI*

SAI invites applications for 323 assistant coaches

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

In a bid to strengthen athlete support, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) has initiated nationwide recruitment of assistant coaches across 26 disciplines for its Centres of Excellence (COE) and other training facilities, with shooting, athletics, swimming, and wrestling set to be among the biggest beneficiaries. SAI has invited applications for 323 assistant coach vacancies, 33 percent of which are reserved for women, to be posted at its various Regional Centres, National Centres of Excellence, and Training Centres across India. "The recruitment methodology is structured into a two-stage process: a computer-based online written test.—*PTI*

India's unbeaten home run on the line in NZ showdown

New Zealand eye historic first series win

INDORE, 17 JAN

India's absolute dominance at home will come under examination when they meet a determined New Zealand in the decisive third ODI at the high-scoring Holkar Stadium here on Sunday, with the three-match series locked at 1-1.

India has not lost a bilateral ODI series at home since March 2019, when Australia overturned a 0-2 deficit to win 3–2, including the decider in Delhi. But that history is now firmly on the line. India's unbeaten home run on the line in NZ showdown. New Zealand eye historic first series win

The Black Caps have toured India for bilateral ODIs since 1989 but have never won a series in India, and this is arguably their best opportunity to break that barren run.

India pacer **Mohammed Siraj** on Saturday backed senior all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja to rediscover his rhythm quickly, insisting that it would only take one wicket for the left-arm spinner to return to his best in the series-deciding.

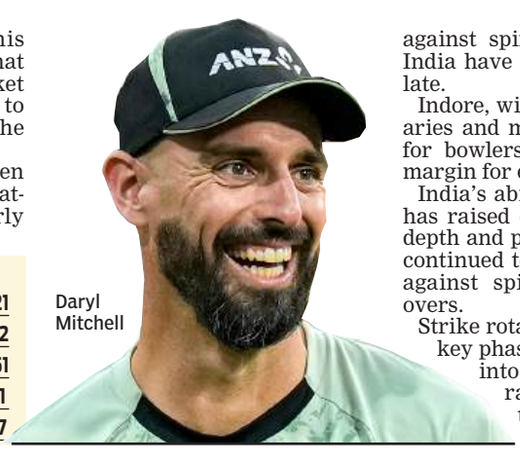
Daryl Mitchell's unbeaten century was built on calculated aggression, particularly against spin, an area where India have been struggling of late.

Indore, with its short boundaries and minimal assistance for bowlers, offers even less margin for error.

India's ability to tackle spin has raised questions. Despite depth and power, the side has continued to show discomfort against spin in the middle overs.

Strike rotation has stalled at key phases, forcing batters into high-risk options rather than controlled accumulation. —*PTI*

India's Shubhman Gill, Mohammed Siraj, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Arshdeep Singh and others during a training session PHOTO: PTI



Daryl Mitchell

INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND ODI

INDIA vs NEW ZEALAND
Match starts in Vadodara
@1.30 pm IST

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	121
INDIA WON:	62
NZ WON:	51
DRAW	1
NO RESULT	7

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY FINAL

Saurashtra, Vidarbha in battle of equals

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A fascinating battle of equals is on cards as a closely-matched Saurashtra and Vidarbha vie for their third and maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy title respectively here at the BCCI Centre of Excellence grounds on Sunday.

Unlike in the past, neither Saurashtra nor Vidarbha has any superstars in their line-up.

But their batters and bowlers have so far performed like a well-oiled machine in this edition of the tournament, helping them humble some more fancied teams en route to the final.

Saurashtra have been served well by the likes of skipper Harvik Desai, their top run-getter with 561 runs, and Vishvaraj Jadeja, who fashioned their semifinal win over Punjab with a blistering hundred.

On the other hand, Vidarbha's batting has been propped up by Aman Mokhade, the tournament's highest run accumulator with 781 runs, and Dhruv Shorey (515 runs).

Mokhade, an opener in the classic mould, has been quite impressive thus far, and his century in the semifinal against Karnataka here was a masterclass in innings building and nerveless construction of chase.

Ravikumar Samarth, too, has underlined his value with some useful contributions in the middle-order, aggregating 427 runs. Nothing really separates these two teams in terms of batting, and bowling too offers a similar tale. The match starts at 1.30 pm. —*PTI*

Manchester United beat Man City in Premier League derby

LONDON, 17 JAN

Michael Carrick got his Manchester United tenure off to the perfect start as his rejuvenated team deservedly beat Pep Guardiola's title-chasing Manchester City 2-0 in an eye-catching derby clash on Saturday.

Carrick took charge of United on Tuesday following Ruben Amorim's sacking in early January, and he immediately restored Kobbie Mainoo to the starting XI as the team produced a performance reminiscent of their glory days.

After seeing two goals disallowed for offside, United finally got themselves in front in the 65th minute when Bryan Mbeumo finished past the excellent Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Left-back Patrick Dorgu made sure of the points as he diverted Matheus Cunha's low cross in off the post with 14 minutes of normal time remaining.

The result moves United up to fourth with Liverpool playing later on Saturday, and leaves City six points adrift of league leaders Arsenal, who have a game in hand.

Pep Guardiola reacted by bringing Nico O'Reilly and Rayan Cherki on at the break, with Foden and Alleyne making way.

City were better following a few tactical tweaks, but United came mightily close again on 57 minutes when Amad cut in and forced Donnarumma into a fine double save as he then kept out Casemiro's follow-up attempt. —*PTI*

BCB SAYS IT'S 'UNINTENTIONAL'

No handshake at toss in India vs B'desh match

BULAWAYO, 17 JAN

The strained bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh filtered onto the cricket field as captains of the two teams abstained from making a customary handshake ahead of their U-19 World Cup Group A match here on Saturday, though BCB later called it "an unintentional and momentary lapse" by its team's skipper.

After a delayed start owing to rain, India skipper Ayush Mhatre and Bangladesh vice-captain Zawad Abrar stood at the toss, but there was no exchange of cordiality between them before or after the spin of the coin.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said in a statement later in the day that "the absence of a handshake with the opposition captain was completely unintentional and resulted from a momentary lapse in concentration."

"There was no intent whatsoever to show discourtesy or disregard towards the opposition," the BCB said in the statement issued in Dhaka.

The BCB said it has taken note of an inadvertent and unwarranted action that occurred at the toss. "Due to illness, regular captain Azizul Hakim was unable to attend the toss, and vice-captain Zawad Abrar represented the team on the occasion. —*PTI*

captains of the two teams abstained from making the customary handshake PHOTO: PTI

B'desh asks ICC to swap group with Ireland, relocate T20 WC matches to SL

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Saturday asked the ICC to swap its national team with Ireland in Group C during the upcoming T20 World Cup in order to play in Sri Lanka instead of India. Bangladesh is currently placed in Group C along with the West Indies, Italy, England, and Nepal, and is scheduled to play its matches in Kolkata and Mumbai. Ireland is in Group B alongside Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman, and Zimbabwe, and their matches are scheduled in Colombo and Pallekele. The two-member ICC team, consisting of Gaurav Saxena, General Manager, Events and Corporate Communications, and Andrew Ephgrave, General Manager, Integrity Unit, was in Dhaka to convince BCB about the security arrangements in India and to follow the original schedule.

PCB set to announce early start for Australia series

LAHORE, 17 JAN

The Pakistan Cricket Board is set to announce an early start to the three-match T20 series against Australia later this month due to the weather and light conditions in Lahore.

A source close to the board said on Saturday that instead of a 6 o'clock evening start, the matches would now begin from 4 pm.

"The announcement in timings will be made soon, but the decision has been taken because of the weather conditions prevailing in Lahore at this time of the year," he said. Motorways and highways have remained closed for long periods in Pakistan's Punjab province due to fog and visibility issues for drivers. Australia will play matches on 29 and 31 January, followed by the last game on 1 February. —*PTI*

UP Warriorz beat MI by 22 runs

NAVI MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Captain Meg Lanning and fellow Australian Phoebe Litchfield struck dominating half-centuries to set up UP Warriorz's comprehensive 22-run win over defending champions Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League (WPL) here on Saturday.

With the win, UP Warriorz stamped their dominance over the Mumbai Indians in the WPL season 4 as they had also beaten the same opponents by seven wickets on Thursday.

This was Mumbai's third loss in five matches, while UP Warriorz notched up their second win in five games.Sent in to bat, Lanning (70) and Litchfield (61) made Mumbai bowling look ordinary with their impressive batting and

shared 119 runs for the second wicket off just 76 balls to take UP Warriorz to 187 for 8. Chasing 188, Mumbai struggled throughout with their top batters failing to make it count.

Openers Hayley Matthews (13) and Sajeevan Sajana (10) fell at the same team score of 23, while one-down Nat Sciver-Brunt (15) and Nicola Carey (6) were also dismissed in quick succession.

Harleen Deol, who scored a match-winning 64 not out in Warriorz's 7-wicket win over the same opponents on Thursday, took a stunning diving catch to get rid of in-form Carey.

Mumbai were 62 for 4 at the halfway mark, needing more than 12 runs an over to overhaul the target.To make matters worse for Mumbai, captain Harmanpreet Kaur (18) was out in the 11th over off the bowling of Chloe Tryon.By then, Mumbai were 69 for 5, and their run chase had gone haywire.

UP Warriorz 187 for 8 (Lanning 70, Litchfield 61, Kerr 3-28, Sciver-Brunt 2-22) beat Mumbai Indians 165 for 6 (Kerr 49*, Amanjot 41, Pandey 2-30) by 22 runs. —*PTI*

India's FIFA World Cup dream is alive: Ashalata

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Indian women's football stalwart Ashalata Devi says the dream of seeing the country play at the FIFA Women's World Cup remains alive, but stressed that sustained progress at the grassroots level is crucial to bridge the gap with the world's elite.

"Our dream of the World Cup is still alive. We still have to work even harder at this time," Ashalata told PTI Videos.

The veteran defender pointed out that all three national teams Under-17, Under-19, and the senior side have qualified for their respective AFC Asian Championships, making 2026 a potentially defining year for the women's game in India.

"Under-17, Under-1,9 and the senior team have already qualified for AFC (competitions). If we do well there, obviously our dream of the World Cup is still alive," she said. One of the most capped players in Indian women's football history, Ashalata who has earned over 100 international caps and captained the national side on multiple occasions said the (senior) team has made steady progress but is still short of world-class standards. —*PTI*

2026 AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Yay for me! 45-year-old Venus Williams is set for a record

MELBOURNE, 17 JAN

At 45, it's no surprise Venus Williams will be setting an age record at the Australian Open when she lines up Sunday in the first round.

The fact that she'll be the oldest player ever to compete in the Australian Open women's singles draw wasn't something she realized until after she'd received a wild-card entry to play at the year's first major for the first time in five years.

"I hadn't thought about it until it came out in the press," she said Saturday in closing her pre-tournament news conference. "So yay. Yay for me! Let's do this." She then left the auditorium and walked hand-in-hand with her husband, Andrea Preti, down a corridor back toward the player area, which isn't much like she remembered it from her previous trip in 2021, the 21st time she'd competed at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic's new approach

Novak Djokovic can still crack a joke when discussing the Carlos Alcaraz-Jannik Sinner rivalry that for two years has prevented him from becoming the most decorated tennis player ever.

"I lost three out of four Slams against either Sinner or Alcaraz," in 2025, he said Saturday, on the eve of the Australian Open.

A defiant Novak Djokovic is adamant he can still beat any player on his day, but at 38, the Serb is no longer focusing on the Grand Slam record, saying he does not need the pressure it brings. With 24 Grand Slam titles, the 10-time Australian Open champion needs one more to move clear of Margaret Court and take sole ownership of the record.

Andreeva beat Mboko

Third-seeded Mirra Andreeva trailed 3-0 but came back to win nine games in a row and 12 of the last 13 to beat Victoria Mboko 6-3, 6-1 in the Adelaide International final on Saturday. The match featured the only players aged under 20 inside the top 20 on the WTA Tour. Andreeva is 18 and Mboko 19. —*PTI*

Grand Slam-level tennis

The 2026 Australian Open will be a Grand Slam-level tennis tournament held at Melbourne Park, from 18 January to 1 February 2026, with the preliminary rounds to be played from 12 to 15 January. It will be the 114th edition of the Australian Open, the 58th in the Open Era, Draw 128S / 64D, Prize money $111,500,000, Surface Hard (GreenSet), and the first major of the year. The tournament will consist of events for professional players in singles, doubles, and mixed doubles. Junior and wheelchair players will compete in singles and doubles tournaments. Jannik Sinner and Madison Keys are the defending men's and women's singles champions, respectively.